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Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE DECEMBER 2007 ISSUE 301

Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW ☎ +44 (0)20 7042 4000



I've been out of the country for a couple of weeks, so missed the UK's press coverage of the new Radiohead album launch. If you missed it too, the kerfuffle surrounds the band's decision to launch the album as a download and allow consumers to decide how much they want to 'donate' for it.

Radiohead's innovative – and some might say, dangerous – new approach to releasing their album has gained them ample publicity, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. Fans who downloaded the album and had the decency to pair a fair amount for it were somewhat aggrieved to discover its relatively poor quality (160kbps).

I caught up with all this in the *USA Today*, and despite the gloom (we've all been waiting for this album, and now it's a bloody download) I drew some comfort from the comments of American consumers. It seems some fans were upset to have 'donated' \$6.50 (£3.25) for the album download, only to learn afterwards of the low audio quality.

This is one of only a couple of occasions when I have read 'download' and 'audio quality' in the same sentence in a national newspaper. One aggrieved Radiohead fan from Oregon said, "It's common knowledge that 192kbps is the accepted minimum bit rate, among everyone who knows what bit rate is". The fact that the article drew attention to the poor quality of downloaded music was a shot in the arm for hi-fi.

Finally, it seems, consumers are once again holding dear the concept of a CD. Which, incidentally, should be out in January!

Dan

Dan George Editor

WHY WE'RE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- We now publish 13 issues a year including a special edition, *The Hi-Fi Awards* – the most important annual awards in the hi-fi calendar. We also produce *The Collection*, a separate stand-alone special edition for the newsstand, dedicated to the finest hi-fi on the planet.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, interviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers from the UK and around the world.
- We only review the most interesting and worthy new hi-fi components – high-performance audio products across a wide range of price points. We obtain more genuine hi-fi exclusives than any other magazine – if it's worthy of your attention, you'll read about it first in *Hi-Fi Choice*.
- Our tests are the most rigorous in the business, conducted by the UK's most experienced team of hi-fi reviewers.
- Alongside in-depth component reviews and accessory round-ups, every regular issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* features an *Ultimate Group Test* on a core hi-fi product category – from source components to amps and speakers.
- Each *Ultimate Group Test* is conducted using a uniquely thorough three-step test regime. This consists of carefully controlled 'blind' and sighted listening sessions, a full set of laboratory tests and extended 'hands on' testing by the primary reviewer. No other magazine goes to such lengths to ensure accurate comparative reviews.
- Components that best meet our exacting standards are listed in the *Buyer's Bible* section – the world's most reliable reference guide for the hi-fi buyer.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...
The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home

Beautiful in-house photography, so you see the product in all its glory

Cherry-picked kit – only the most worthy components make it into *Hi-Fi Choice*

Comprehensive in-depth reviews – we give you the full story

Wooden it be nice?

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

Carefully considered verdict scores, so you really know what we think of a product

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT WRITERS AND REVIEWERS INCLUDE...



PAUL MESSENGER
A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



JIMMY HUGHES
With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the country's best known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of system matching, hi-fi tweaking and record collecting is unmatched in the industry.



RICHARD BLACK
Richard is a professional musician, recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a knack for writing about complicated subjects in a readable way – and he only writes for *HFC*.



MALCOLM STEWARD
Former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* magazine, Malcolm was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible *The British Audio Journal*.



ALVIN GOLD
Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopaedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides).



ALAN SIRCOM
Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear... and beyond.



JASON KENNEDY
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



DOMINIC TODD
A highly experienced journalist, Dominic's sharp ears and retail experience are a valuable mix for *HFC*. Each month, Dom dispenses priceless second-hand buying advice that always comes in handy.

To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business.

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FREE MINI-MAG!

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3 Trading pages

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100 % Beryllium
 100 % Made in France
 100 % Focal

Electra 1037 Be [2007 newcomer]
 and Electra 1027 Be, Classic finish.

Electra 1000 Be : mastering our own innovations

Focal designs and manufactures the tweeter dome in pure Beryllium according to an exclusive and patented manufacturing process. It's the only possible guarantee of the total mastery of the performance. And it's also true for any other Focal technologies in the Electra 1000 Be line: W cone, 1AL infinite load tweeter, OPC crossover, Advanced Gamma Structure cabinetry... Because our technologies and know-how are too precious to be left in others' care.

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UNISON RESEARCH P70 INTEGRATED VALVE AMPLIFIER

▶ Unison Research's pure valve models have featured single-ended operation for more than a decade. Now, with the P70, Professor Sacchetti of Unison Research returns to a push-pull design.

Clearly, the first thing people see is the beautiful thick Murano glass front panel, that hides the glowing valves within. As the name suggests, the new P70 is a 70 watts per channel design in glorious stereo.

Right now, concrete information on Unison's new amp is very sketchy, and although we know it uses six input triodes and four output pentodes operating in something

approaching a dual mono design, you'll have to wait until next issue to find out what really makes this four-input Italian integrated amplifier tick.

To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Unison Research P70

TYPE Integrated stereo valve amplifier

PRICE £3,495

KEY FEATURES 70 watts per channel ◉ Four line inputs ◉ All-valve design ◉ Push-pull configuration ◉ Murano glass front panel

CONTACT ☎ 01753 652669
www.unisonresearch.com



Maria Callas, Metallica, Miles Davis, Muse, Muddy Waters, Madonna, Massive Attack.

Whatever your tastes in music, the Linn Majik System enables you to experience the full emotion of the artist's original performance in your home.

We would normally let the sound speak for itself. However, in this instance it's also worth mentioning that you could own the new Linn Majik System for only **£3500**.

Visit www.linn.co.uk/majikoffer to find out more and arrange a demonstration at your nearest Linn specialist.



The Linn Majik System comprises the Majik CD Player, the new Majik-I Integrated Amplifier, Katan Loudspeakers with stands, installation and a 5 year* warranty. (* when you register your products with Linn)
This exclusive offer must end 31st December 2007.

The usual price of the Linn Majik System is £4,290



LINN

www.linn.co.uk

MYSTÈRE IA11 INTEGRATED VALVE AMPLIFIER

▶ Affordable high-end valve specialist, Prima Luna, has raised its game. Coming from the same design team, the new Mystère range of valve amplifiers moves the profile up a notch, while still offering the same notable value for money.

The ia11 is the entry-level model of the two-strong Mystère range and sports four 6SN7 valves in the input stage and four EL34 power pentode valves. This means it delivers a healthy 40 watts per channel.

This design combines elegant looks – the rich piano gloss finish looks sumptuous, and the amp looks wonderful even with its

protective cover in place – with audiophile cred. It may only have the four line inputs and no remote control, but its heart is in the right place – right in the midst of the music.

To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Mystère ia11

TYPE Integrated stereo valve amplifier

PRICE £1,250

KEY FEATURES Single-ended, dual mono design

▶ 40 watts per channel ▶ Four line inputs

▶ 24 step attenuator volume control

CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909

🌐 www.pistolmusic.co.uk



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

WHARFEDALE OPUS2

Wharfedale's new Opus2 speaker series is a five-strong range of large, full-range loudspeakers (two standmounts, three floorstanders) together with an attendant collection of front and rear speakers

designed for home cinema use. Even the smallest model in the range – the Opus2-M1 – is a fully-fledged three-way speaker design featuring a 170mm cone bass driver, a 75mm textile dome midrange and a 25mm dome tweeter, while the top of the range Opus2-3 boasts two 250mm bass units. All models are free-space designs – although the Opus2-2 can be used as close as 10cm from the walls – and the range is designed from the outset to deliver the dynamic range found in real music, which, according to Wharfedale is 'beyond that possible from conventional high-fidelity loudspeakers'.

Price £1,000 (Opus2-M1) to £3,500 (Opus2-3)

Due now

☎ 0845 4580011

🌐 www.wharfedale.co.uk



MUSICAL FIDELITY A5.5

Musical Fidelity has beefed up its already pretty beefy A5 integrated amplifier. The existing model has been replaced by a fundamentally similar design, but the new A5.5 now sports improved protection circuitry, better output devices and a USB input for connection to computer audio sources. According to Musical Fidelity, the improved circuit means even better peak current delivery. You'd have to compare the two side-by-side, but even the front panel has been subtly redesigned. The A5.5's power output remains unchanged at 250 watts per channel, however.

Price £1,599 **Due** now ☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com



ROTH AUDIO OLI

Roth Audio has branched out from its traditional valve amp and iPod dock offerings with a new three-strong range of loudspeakers, styled to partner the company's Music Cocoon dock. The baby of the range is the £100 OLi1 – a two-way standmount that stands just 20cm tall and can handle up to 100 watts of welly. Moving up a step, the OLi2 costs £149 and is also a standmount, but with a bigger cabinet and larger drive units. Topping the range is the OLi3, a one-metre floorstander with twin bass drivers and a tweeter, all for £249. More models are planned.

Price from £100 (OLi1) to £249 (OLi3)

Due December

☎ 01189 880300

🌐 www.rothaudio.co.uk



NAD T975

Designed as a powerhouse for either home cinema or multichannel use, the new NAD T975 is a 7x 140 watts per channel power amplifier with distinctly audiophile aspirations. The design is built upon traditional modular monoblock lines and features the NAD's own PowerDrive circuitry. It also sports NAD's ever-popular soft clipping circuit and a variable-speed fan, first seen in the Masters Series products. The power amplifier is typically conservatively rated, turning in a healthy 200 watts per channel in two-channel mode. NAD has included input gain control on each channel and a 12V trigger for remote power up. The perfect choice for tri-amping!

Price £1,600 **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com



TRIANGLE GENÈSE/ESPRIT EX

French speaker expert Triangle has announced one wholly new range plus an overhaul of the Esprit Esw series. The new Esprit EX series comprises four replacements for the popular Titus and Comete floorstanders and the Altea and Antal standmounts. There is also a new Heyda surround and a new Voce centre channel speaker. The three-strong Genèse series – consisting of the standmount Trio, the floorstanding Quarter and the range-topping Lyrr – is designed to sit between the new Esprit EX series and Magellan models. Triangle claims all seven main speakers and both AV speakers draw heavily from the research that went into the development of the Magellan models.

Price from £210 (Heyda EX) to £2,650 (Lyrr) **Due** now
 ☎ 01753 652669 ☎ www.triangle-fr.com



TEAC AG-980

Multiroom technology hits a new price point, thanks to the new TEAC AG-980. The stereo AM/FM receiver has connections for four pairs of loudspeakers, arranged onto a main zone and individually controlled sub-zone. These zones can handle different inputs, speaker switching and even volume levels. In standard stereo mode, the receiver delivers 100 watts per channel, or 35 watts per channel when all channels are driven. The multizone concept allows one room to play the tuner, for example, while another can engage the CD player. The sub-zone also has preamp outputs and a 12V trigger for driving an amplifier in the second zone, while RS-232C connections allow the AG-980 to be controlled by a powerful remote control.

Price £279 **Due** now
 ☎ 0845 130 2511 ☎ www.teac.co.uk



MARANTZ SR8002

Representing the current state of the digital connection art, the Marantz SR8002 receiver is one of the first to feature HDMI 1.3a output. The four HDMI inputs and outputs support the latest spec, and this finally gets the connection close to the 'Digital SCART' lead originally suggested. The THX Select II-certified, 7x 125 watt receiver decodes the latest HD audio soundtracks, including Dolby True HD and DTS Master Audio lossless formats. The receiver also uses Audyssey MultEQ system, which makes for quick and easy room calibration inside of 15 minutes. The receiver can even be used as a three-zone (two AV, one audio only) system, directed by the backlit LCD remote control supplied.

Price £1,300 **Due** now
 ☎ 01753 680868 ☎ www.marantz.com



ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE22

It's been 15 years since an Acoustic Energy speaker won popular support with pros and home users alike, but with the new AE22 (in active or passive configuration) the company has developed a true near-field monitor that should prove popular in both settings. The AE22 is a heavyweight 250x350x330mm sealed cabinet, featuring a new 200mm alloy bass driver and a 25mm ring-radiator tweeter with neodymium magnet. The active version features both balanced and unbalanced XLR input and separate 200 watt power amplifiers for each driver.

Price £450 per pair (passive);
 £800 per pair (active)
Due now
 ☎ 01285 654432
 ☎ www.acoustic-energy.co.uk



Soundbites

ISOTEK'S latest products are applying the same mains-busting performance we have grown to love in hi-fi to the home cinema system. The new Mira and Pictoris mains systems include a filter specifically designed for television mains. First model out of the starting gates is the £150 Mira, a two-plug unit, designed to extend the life of plasma TVs.



☎ 01635 291357

PURE is not content with hooking up with rock stars for its charity radio auction, the DAB-meister is giving away £1 from every radio sold toward the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Pure has also developed the £100 SONUS-1XT DAB radio in association with the RNIB. The radio's iVOX voice feedback system uses a real human voice to announce the DAB station names, time, alarm and more. Cool huh?

☎ 01923 277488

MONSTER'S HTS 950 PowerCentre is a colour-coded mains conditioner and surge protector. It features a special protection circuit that disconnects all equipment and sounds the alarm if the AC power conditions turn potentially dangerous for your system. It even helps out phone and cable lines, all for £130.

☎ 01923 431634



TRUE COLOURS INDUSTRIES' new Baby Constrictor power block uses TCI's eight PTFE insulated silver-plated copper conductor mains lead connected to a remarkably solid German-made Brennstuhl four-way 13A distribution block, all for a very reasonable £80 for a one-metre cable.

☎ 07710 196949

NAD has updated its popular PP-1 phono stage. The new PP-2 now comes in a natty titanium finish, can now support high-gain moving coil as well as moving magnet cartridges, and NAD has improved the performance in the process. The PP-2 will set you back £50.

☎ 01279 501111



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

JAMES ROTH
Job Title: Man In Charge
Company: Roth Audio



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

I think this has to be the Roth Audio ALFiE – our new iPod audio system with built in amplifier, speakers, DVD player, CD player and FM/AM radio. It looks beautiful, sounds great and will have a suggested retail price of just £400.

What's the best innovation you've succeeded at recently?

The obvious innovation is the iPhone: until I turn mine on, I can't comment further, but let's face it, it's cool. Even in the box.

Can 'Generation iPod' be turned on to hi-fi?

Of course. Increasing numbers of people with iPods are migrating to more expensive, better-sounding (and looking) systems. They are rapidly learning that better quality music can be stored on their iPod and understand that to get the best out of it, they need a better-sounding audio system.

What's your all-time favourite record?

Kind of Blue by Miles Davis. I'm a trumpet player, so it's kinda obvious that this would be my choice!

DVD-Audio or SACD, and why?

Neither. It's another dull format 'war' that's irrelevant to so many customers today. No one can explain to me in a convincing way why I should buy either format and as I am a typical customer, this is somewhat disappointing.

Hi-Fi Diary

JANUARY 2008

26-27 Northern Sound & Vision Show
Radisson SAS, Manchester Airport
www.chestergroup.org
Manchester's newest hi-fi show

FEBRUARY

10 Audiojumble 2008
Angel Leisure Centre, Tonbridge, Kent
www.audiojumble.co.uk
One of the UK's largest vintage hi-fi fairs

22-24 Sound & Vision – The Bristol Show
Marriott City Centre Hotel, Bristol
www.bristolshow.co.uk
The UK's premier hi-fi show

Amazon DRM-free

As Virgin Digital (the online wing of Virgin Music) closes its doors Amazon.com has opened its own music download service with DRM-free songs for 89 cents. Amazon is using a system of fingerprinting the music it sells, so that when illegally shared copies are found, it will be possible to trace the original buyer. Songs will be available at the relatively high bit rate of 256kbps in standard MP3 format. Amazon claims that several of the labels it will be offering have never been available DRM-free before (unless you buy the CDs, of course). Such labels will include retro rappers, Sugar Hill, and reggae specialist, Trojan. While iTunes offers a selection of DRM-free material it charges more than Amazon does for them, plus the songs can only be played on Apple's iPod products.

There is another player in this market, namely eMusic, which offers a DRM-free subscription service – an arrangement that brings prices down as low as 28 cents per download. However, Amazon's strong brand could make it the most serious competitor to iTunes yet.



51GB HD DVD

The DVD Forum has given the go-ahead to Toshiba's triple-layer, 51GB disc technology, which paves the way for HD DVDs with (slightly) higher capacity than Blu-ray discs. At present HD DVD capacity is limited to 15GB per layer and, thus far, discs have not exceeded two layers. Toshiba has reduced the recording pit size, managing to eek an extra 2GB from each layer, to produce a disc with 1GB more capacity than a Blu-ray alternative. Whether this format will be compatible with existing HD DVD players remains to be seen, but as market penetration is still relatively low it is hoped that this will not be a barrier to the creation of the higher capacity disc. In terms of capacity, 51GB equates to seven hours at a high-res 17mbps.



At present, HD DVD appears to be winning the battle of reviews, as Blu-ray players are not yet up to speed with the latest HDMI connection standard, and are unable to support certain features that are lined up for the format.

Vodasound

Vodafone is confident that its new MusicStation service is going to be the killer application for licensed music downloads. It offers unlimited downloads to mobile phone users for £1.99 per week and will be bundled with three mobile handsets: Nokia's N95, the Sony Ericsson W910i, and an updated version of Samsung's F700. In addition, Vodafone claims the service will also run on 70 per cent of the world's mobiles. What sets MusicStation apart from the competition is the backing of the big four labels and 30 carriers globally. PC and Mac users can also access the service for £2.99 a month, but Vodafone is hoping that by making the DRM-protected service easy to use, and by offering the ability to share playlists with other subscribers, it will be able to turn a profit where others are struggling.



SACD in-car

Just as the format appears to be on the verge of extinction as far as non-classical software is concerned, Sony has launched an in-car SACD player. The MEX-DV1000 is pretty much a universal player with DVD-V playback and Dolby Digital processing for in-car multichannel replay, something that's presumably aimed at movies but could equally apply to SACD in 5.1. It's also an FM receiver that replays MP3 and WMA encoded discs, and boasts a rated power of 4 x 52 watts, although these are in-car watts and not to be mistaken for the real thing. Critically, this state-of-the-art player is also karaoke-ready and can be had online for as little as £136.



Form and function

⊕ Finnish speaker maker Gradient is not averse to challenging the norms as its Helsinki 1.5 prototype makes plain. This open baffle design has what Gradient designer Jouko Alanko calls an 'acoustic resistance enclosure' for the midrange, the purpose being to create a cardioid radiation pattern. The tweeter has a relatively large wave guide, while the bass operates as dipole and is said to give output down to 35Hz with the right room positioning. The lack of a box inevitably undermines sensitivity, but this is quoted as being a reasonable (under the circumstances) 85dB.



Gradient made its first speaker 25 years ago, so while this model may seem off-the-wall the company boasts a track record that suggests the results could be interesting.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #55

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



The ultimate tweak – de-tweaking your system!

Every now and again (once a decade or so) it's time to really wig-out on all the tweaking. If you are the kind of person who can never quite settle, changing this, adjusting that, there's a lot to be said in going all Cultural Revolution on your hi-fi. Okay, maybe not the full Little Red Book version... there's no need to parade 'reactionary' amplifiers in

the street, however it's no bad thing to strip away every single modification out of the system and go back to basics.

Sometimes, by adding tweak upon tweak you can drift far from an accurate presentation of music. By stripping back to the original system, you can see how far you have gone and whether every tweak was worth the effort. Then, you can enjoy working out which ones to put back!

TOP 10 INSANITY-FI TWEAKS

1. The £50 mains fuse
2. Freezing your CDs
3. Green rings on your CDs
4. Wet-playing your LPs
5. Drinking 'polarised' water before listening
6. A piece of paper under one foot of your hi-fi
7. Lining up the screw heads on your mains plugs
8. Raising your speaker cables off the floor
9. Electromagnetically 'clarifying' CD
10. Translating your CDs into Elvish and then sorting accordingly



⊕ New Music

IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



GNARLS BARKLEY

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

Originally due this autumn, the eagerly anticipated follow-up to *St Elsewhere* from producer Danger Mouse and rapper Cee-Lo has been delayed until early next year. Recording sessions at their Atlanta base have been interrupted because the prolific and in-demand producer is currently being employed on albums from Martina Topley-Bird, Shortwave Set and The Black Keys.

TONY BENNETT & STEVIE WONDER

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

After Wonder appeared on Bennett's Grammy-winning *Duets: An American Classic*, on which they duetted on *For Once In My Life*, the pair are now plotting a full-scale album collaboration. "We enjoyed working together and being with each other, so it seems natural to do more," explained Bennett.

REM

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

It's official: Jackknife Lee is producing the new REM album and according to REM's Mike Mills the album was "two-thirds complete" by early September, with three weeks of recording still to go. "Michael's got a bunch of singing and I've got some backgrounds to do", said Mills.

THE RACONTEURS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

Rock royalty, The Raconteurs, have released a few details about their new album. Currently being recorded in Nashville, Hives frontman. Howlin' Pelle Almqvist will guest on a track called *Footsteps*. Singer Brendan Benson also uses a well-known quote variously attributed to Frank Zappa and/or Brian Eno that describing the songs is "like dancing about architecture".



KINGS OF LEON

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

After topping the charts earlier this year with *Because Of The Times*, Kings of Leon are already planning the follow-up. "We try to strike while the iron's hot and we're writing some really good stuff," singer Caleb Followill says. "Because of the thrill of being number one, I think the new songs really have something about them. This is gonna be like a Wham! Record". The mind boggles...

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Simone Dinnerstein JS Bach: Goldberg Variations (Oct), **Michael Murray/ Eugene Ormandy/ Philadelphia Orch** Saint-Saens: Symphony No3 (Oct), **Dave Brubeck** Indian Summer (Oct), **Stan Tracey Orchestra** At The Appleby Jazz Festival (Oct)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Combattimento Consort Amsterdam (de Vriend) Bach: Christmas Oratorio (SACD, Oct), **John Gorka**, *The Gypsy Life*, (DVD-A, Oct), **Haydn Philharmonie (Fischer)** Haydn: Symphony No97 and No102 (SACD, Oct), **Atlanta Symphony (Runnicles)** Rule Britannia (SACD, Oct), **Otis Redding, Sam & Dave etc** Stax/Volt Review, Live in Norway 1967, (DVD-A, Oct)



Alvin Gold

Less lunch, more music

Live music is key to promoting hi-fi

One of the small pleasures that the hi-fi industry affords me is the chance to visit foreign shores, to gain an education on the various manufacturer's latest products. In my early days scribbling about audio, it was common practice to expose undernourished hacks such as myself to exotic meals in expensive, sometimes even Michelin-starred establishments, and to throw in a little live music on the side.

How things have changed. I still get around a bit, all in the interests of learning about new gear of course, but with some exceptions, live music has practically disappeared from the menu. In the past, and on a number of occasions, the collective hacks of the hi-fi press were invited to concerts at St Martin in the Fields by Technics, to listen to surprisingly eclectic material, perhaps some rarely performed piece from Panufnik or Corigliano, which was then recorded for release within a few days on their label. There were

“Concert tickets usually cost less than expensive meals in Michelin-starred restaurants. Personally, a sandwich and a cup of coffee will keep me sweet.”

visits to studios, sometimes even location recording sessions. I once refused a trip to visit Acoustic Research, unless they organized a trip to hear something – anything – at the Boston Symphony Hall, one of the world's great classical venues. Luckily, they understood.

Over the last few months, I have visited Munich, Berlin, Prague (twice) and Paris. However, I only really struck gold with an excellent performance of Mahler's *7th Symphony* by the Israel Philharmonic in Paris, thanks to Triangle. While in Prague, I toured the city in a vintage car, but in a city full of music and musicians, I heard no Dvorak, no Janacek and no Smetana, just one rather fine street band. In Berlin, with almost three days spare, there was no music on offer.

Once it would have been unthinkable for a Prom season to pass without several invitations from hi-fi companies to attend the Royal Albert Hall, but this year there were none. One company has invited a group of journalists to a concert at the newly refurbished Royal Festival Hall, just before Christmas this year: it consists mainly of what can best be described as Classic FM-style lollipops. I'm very pleased to be going, but I've just noted that the previous day in the same venue Mahler's colourful *3rd symphony*

is to be performed. What a choice that would have been!

A lot of thought and money goes into press events, and of course the industry owes me and other journalists absolutely nothing. But coincidentally or otherwise, I have noticed that alongside its increasing maturity, the hi-fi industry has increasingly drifted away from what makes it tick – live, quality music-making. It's an activity that hi-fi companies used to promote, not by just exposing a sometimes Philistine press corps, but more importantly in straight public sponsorship and support. To them, I have two messages. First, the lack of interest in the kind of music that, for some, is considered 'hard work' may be mirrored in the apparent lack of interest in good live music. And yes, I'm talking primarily about classical music, where proactive support is most needed. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, concert tickets usually cost less than expensive meals in fancy restaurants. Speaking personally, a sandwich and a cup of coffee will do me fine.

Alvin Gold began writing about hi-fi more than 300 years ago and has since become one of the UK's most internationally renowned reviewers



Winter tweaks

It's the time of year to try a new approach

The hi-fi season is here, which means plenty of cosy nights in around the hi-fi. All the more reason, then, to treat your system to a bit of TLC and DIY cleaning.

Starting with the speakers, the first thing to check is the positioning. You may find moving the speakers away from the wall cures that slightly over-rich bass. Next up, remove any speaker grills and tighten everything up – this five-minute tweak can improve bass cohesion. Also, ensure that any stand spikes are nice and tight, and consider the filling in your speaker stands. If they're filled with sand, then bear in mind that sand settles over time and isn't as effective at quelling vibrations. The answer is to empty all the sand and mix in polystyrene pieces. If this sounds like too much hard work, then maybe consider a proprietary, metal-based product, such as Atacama's Atabites.

Connections work best when fresh and clean, so strip back a section of new speaker cable and clean every cable connection point. This can either be done with isopropyl alcohol or, one of the specialised formulations such as Kontak, or van den Hul's The Solution. At around £15 and £25 these shouldn't break the bank, yet both provide audible improvements.

Don't forget your mains, either. Strip back the cable inside the mains plug and clean all the connections, including fuse and holder. If you're not using upgraded mains cables then at least invest a few pounds in Crabtree or MK plugs.

I always find that a demagnetizing disc works well in a CD player, but that's pretty much all you should do – cleaning the laser with a disc-type cleaner can do more harm than good. Record decks are more receptive to a bit of attention. Cleaning the belt in water is a simple job and while it's off, give the sub platter and motor pulley a wipe down with isopropyl alcohol, too. Individually, these small tweaks make only a slight difference. Put them altogether, though, and your few hours of labour should produce an improvement akin to a component upgrade.

Dominic Todd began his hi-fi career in the retail business and has been a freelance hi-fi reviewer and columnist since 1993 ▶

P

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

PASS LABS X350 AMPLIFIER

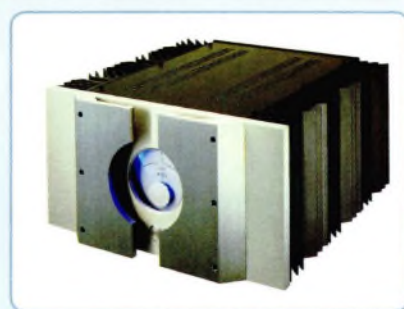


Pass Labs was named after founder and designer, Nelson Pass, who was also associated closely with other high-end brands, notably

Threshold. Pass Labs only dates back as far as 1991, but the company's designs benefited directly from Pass's already well-developed understanding of amplifier topologies. He has a number of significant patents in the area of audio amplification to his name, and collaborated with Peter Walker when Quad was working on Feedforward. His current designs for Pass Labs are largely consistent with other amplifiers he has put his name to throughout his career.

Now discontinued, the X350 was the smallest of three siblings and distinguished mainly by power output. It's a solid state Class A amplifier rated at 350 watts/channel, with plenty of current that delivers output through a total of 48 multiple parallel MOSFETS in single-ended configurations – 24 per channel. The largest of the three models is a visually identical monoblock, the X600. Yet the look of the amplifier barely differs from current models, with an identical front panel that's dominated by a huge, internally lit moving coil meter, and two enormous handles shaped to fit around the meter, lending the design a completely unique appearance. The meter is not designed to indicate power, but at its normal deflection it shows standing current in the output stage. It only strays from this normal position when the amplifier is driven out of Class A region into an enriched Class AB, which in most rooms, and with most loudspeakers only very rarely happens, such is the power available before the amplifier can no longer cope in standard single ended Class A mode. The design is fully balanced from input through to output, with the alternatively single-ended input driving just one side of the amplifier. No surprise then that the X350 is at its most convincing in fully balanced trim, but you'll be hard pressed to find US-sourced, high-end source components or preamplifiers that are not balanced.

Pass Labs claimed that the design of its X range was based first and foremost on simplicity, with the minimum number of gain stages (two), and the fewest possible components in the



“Pass Labs claimed that the design of its X range was based first and foremost on simplicity.”

audio signal path as a means of maximising transparency. Simple as it is, this is not the greenest amplifier around: it has a high (600 watts) standing current consumption, rising to 1800 watts at full output. In the manner of other Class A amplifiers, it also runs unusually hot, even at idle, and hotter still if the fires are stoked hard. And it weighs in at a hefty 68kg.

Using the X350 is quite an experience. This is an amplifier with presence and gravitas, with a sound that makes its presence felt. There was a distinct authority, fullness and warmth in the way it reproduced the low-frequency end of the spectrum, with tremendous finesse in the mid and treble regions. On paper, the design of the X350 looks more like a valve amplifier than traditional solid-state, and in many ways this is how it sounds, but with the kind of raw power and freedom from obvious load coupling effects that its thermionic counterparts would find difficult to match.

Few Pass Labs amplifiers made it to our shores; the brand has never really had the market presence. However, a Pass Labs amp like an X350 in good condition should be all but indestructible. If you can cope with the purchase price and the electrical running costs, and your shelving can stand the physical strain, it is hard to think of a better second-hand purchase out there. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



Richard Black

Don't believe the hype

A healthy dose of cynicism works wonders

I saw a lovely tag at the end of someone's contribution to an internet forum the other day: 'The plural of anecdote is not data'. Google tells me that the originator of that quote is one Frank Kotsonis, an expert on Nutritional Toxicology. He may or may not be a hi-fi enthusiast, but his little *bon mot* seems particularly appropriate to our field.

Well, in a way. I'm not about to suggest that we're hung up on data. On the contrary, many hi-fi types – manufacturers, journalists and consumers alike – tend to be wary of those big Audio Engineering Society-style listening tests, whose statistically processed outcomes 'prove' that all cables/CD players/amps sound the same. But to the extent that we like a bit of accepted wisdom now and again, we do display exactly the kind of behaviour Kotsonis warns us against. I think component X sounds great,

“An inappropriate review can cost jobs at a manufacturer, and I wouldn't want to be unjustly responsible for someone losing their livelihood.”

you think so, he thinks so... but that doesn't actually *prove* it's any good at all.

The power of suggestion is considerable. Let's say I get an amplifier in for review, and take an immediate shine to it. A friend drops round that evening and I offer to play him 'this lovely little amplifier'. He's already been set up to like it by my cheerful demeanour and uplifting introduction. He doesn't need to make a conscious effort to please me by agreeing, his subconscious will do that already. Just ask any good salesman how many sales he's ever made while scowling, smile and the world smiles with you.

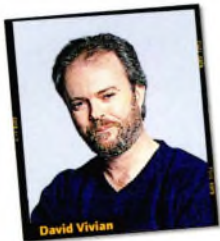
Of course, I might have been wrong. Some fortuitous circumstance could easily have swayed me in favour of the amplifier, anything from its appearance to the arrival of a bit of good news just beforehand. Nevertheless, my friend goes and spreads the word and a reputation is born. Or destroyed, of course.

Some of the more bonkers tweaks in audio over the years have certainly been spread by exactly this method. Most have their nine days wonder and then peter out, while others rumble on for years. A few have a rational explanation that isn't what the manufacturer suggested at

all, and therefore work almost by accident. You could even invoke the placebo effect and say that if people think a tweak works, it does, which is fine until you factor in the expense, often considerable, for what might as well be a sheet of bog roll.

Professional reviewers have more reason than most to beware such irrational judgements. An inappropriate review can cost jobs at a manufacturer, and I'm sure I speak for my colleagues when I say I wouldn't want to be unjustly responsible for someone losing their livelihood. Blind tests, like those we regularly employ for our monthly group tests, plus lab testing and good old-fashioned experience help avoid mistakes, though only a fool would claim complete infallibility, especially in such a tricky area. Perhaps best of all, though, is a side dish of cynicism. Next time someone tells you that this or that component or tweak is the latest wonder product, just say a little 'Oh yeah?' to yourself – and then see what it sounds like!

Richard Black is a professional musician, recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He writes exclusively for HFC



Never mind the Botox

Extreme DIY hi-fi enhancement

The ultimate tweak? Seems we have some way to go before we can get even remotely close to the level of excessiveness that recently saw an Apple enthusiast have his thumbs surgically whittled, so that he could better operate his iPhone's snazzy touch-screen interface. Perhaps he was inspired the film *Edward Scissorhands* and has subsequently had his name changed to Adrian Applethumbs. Or maybe he knew that the new iPod would have the same the touch-screen technology and couldn't resist a two-for-one deal.

Either way, fooling around with cables, cones and slabs of concrete doesn't really cut it. If real hi-fi is to survive in an iPod world where people are prepared to have parts of their bodies sliced off to improve the man/machine interface, we need to up the ante when it comes to radical ways of interacting with our passion. Unfortunately, a quick trawl of the internet doesn't throw up anything overly useful. Even typing "Peter Belt" – famous for his perception-enhancing foils, balms and safety pins – into Google failed to unearth anything I hadn't encountered before, except a reference to me as a "silly fellow", presumably for failing to comprehend his treatments in a previous column.

No, I think we need a new direction and, since no one else seems to be making the effort, I've come up with a few ideas of my own. The first is stylus-alignment specs (patent pending). It's a simple idea, really, based upon clear glass (or prescription) spectacles with alignment grids printed on the surface. You simply rest your chin on the edge of the turntable plinth, focus on the end of your nose and, via the visual stereo algorithms of Magic Eye 3D imaging, you'll eventually see a pride of lions playfully nibbling each other's ears on the platter. The experience will be so relaxing you'll want to play a record instead of fiddling around with pliers and minute screws.

My second great idea for hi-fi enhancement is the cryogenic listening room. It's a little more involved this one, mind. Basically, instead of putting CDs, interconnects and, indeed, hi-fi components in the freezer to make them sound better, why not address the issue wholesale and turn your listening room into a

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

THE POGUES
RUM SODOMY AND THE LASH



"Their music is like the brandy of the damned," wrote Tom Waits of The Pogues. And none of the group's records came more potent from the distillery than *Rum, Sodomy And The Lash*. Named after a quote attributed to Winston Churchill ("The only traditions of the Royal Navy are rum, sodomy and the lash!"), it gave their poetic Irish punk-folk an enduring clarity and was one of the best albums of the decade.

Though their lineage can be traced from punk-era groups The Nipple Erectors and The Millwall Chainsaws, The Pogues donned old suits and played their first show in October 1982 (back then they were called Pogue Mahone, Gaelic for 'Kiss My Arse'). After 1984's class debut *Red Roses For Me* – a rock band augmented by banjo, accordion and penny whistle, playing breakneck versions of traditional tunes and mordant London songs – their touring patron, Elvis Costello, stepped in to produce the follow-up. Costello said his mission was to "capture them in all their dilapidated glory before some more professional producer fu* *ed them up," a task completed piecemeal in Wapping's Elephant Studios due to the band's relentless gigging. The band would amuse themselves by baiting Costello, who was then romantically involved with bassist Cait O'Riordan; Costello, meanwhile, pushed his musical ideas through, sometimes telling the band to do better when they protested.

The results were proof that there's nothing wrong with a bit of studio tension to bring out the best in a group. Yes, The Pogues and the booze angle is overdone, but listening to it is like being in the company of men who have achieved wisdom, illumination and self-knowledge through drink. And even if it is sometimes imparted chaotically, singer and lyricist Shane MacGowan's delivery remains clear compared to his later mush-mouthedness. As well as abandon and exultation, the lasting impact is one of real emotion.

This applies as much to covers (Ewan MacColl's *Dirty Old Town* and Eric Bogle's *And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda* among them) as to originals; consider *The Old Main Drag*, the lament of a past-it, burned out rent-boy.



"Listening to it is like being in the company of men who have achieved wisdom and illumination through drink."

Among the accordion drones and references to the drug Tuinal, MacGowan's soulful yelping is as moving as hell, as are the other songs of everyday heroism, degradation, oppression, freedom, life and death. There is lots of death – singer and whistle player Spider Stacy once said ten of the 12 songs are about death, and one of them was an instrumental – but they all stop short of mawkishness. "Irish folk music is a totally ignored subculture," explained MacGowan at that year's Cambridge Folk Festival. "It's probably the only one... we're not trying to put anything across as far as we actually believe in anything, it comes out in the feeling in some of the words, but we're not actually saying anything to anybody..."

Rum, Sodomy And The Lash reached number 13 on its August 1985 release, but it contained no hits, though two years later The Pogues would be on Top Of The Pops duetting with their spiritual forebears, The Dubliners.

The band launched the album on HMS Belfast on 30th June, 1985 and on 5th September found themselves on RTE discussing their place in the Irish musical tradition. Respected concertina player Noel Hill memorably called their music "a terrible abortion", and soon after O'Riordan was treating the listeners to her impression of a grunting pig. Had the Pogues won the argument? It's doubtful that they cared. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

❑ cryogenically frozen environment? The benefits will extend to your own listening apparatus (specifically, your ears and your brain) and, what's more, you'll be frozen to the spot, thereby removing the hard-to-kick habit of getting up to perform some minor tweak, rather than sitting back and listening to the music.

I'm afraid that my third and final idea requires greater expenditure. It's called the Max Volume package. No matter how powerful your amplifier or large your speakers, your neighbours will never complain again. There might well be a bit of a wait for this but, basically, Sir Richard Branson fires you and your hi-fi system into orbit where... well, no one can hear Axl Rose scream.

Then again, Sir Richard, the potential benefits of whittled thumbs in zero gravity, eh? I think we should be told.

David Vivian has been wallowing in gorgeous hi-fi and then describing its virtues and vices in Hi-Fi Choice since 1990



Totally tubular

valves are on the comeback trail

It's a funny old world, as audiophiles who've been around a while can testify. There may be little to rival the output of entrants to the IgNobel Prizes, where the ultimate in bizarre scientific research is recognised (past winners include an eyewitness report of the first case of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard duck), but some hi-fi products appear destined to raise an eyebrow or two.

The final extinction of the black disc has long been predicted, but successive generations of 'yoof' continue to ensure there's life in the old medium yet, as indie kids and dance DJs still often prefer to lug vertebrae-squashing boxes full of 7" or 12" slabs of PVC, instead of a collection of small polycarbonate discs, or a couple of memory sticks bulging with MP3s.

Another hi-fi technology which has had one foot in the grave for longer than many can remember is the valve, but even that's being dragged a bit closer towards the mainstream with a couple of unusual technological combinations. I suppose it was inevitable that the ubiquitous iPod would get the valve treatment at some stage, and thanks to TL



"It's only a matter of time before Apple introduces the iPhone Tubed Special Edition as a piece of cutting-edge military hardware."

Audio's Fatman iTube valve dock, retrophiles everywhere can now plug their player into the shiny valve dock with its matching hybrid valve amplifier and a pair of suitable speakers.

Clearly, it's only a matter of time before Apple introduces the iPhone TSE (Tubed Special Edition), perhaps as a piece of cutting-edge military hardware powered by a couple of ECC83s. Of course, the rucksack-sized battery pack and talk time of 37 seconds may limit popularity.

Philips, erstwhile valve manufacturer itself, has also felt the call of nostalgia with its MCD908 DVD micro theatre system. The promo literature that accompanies the MCD908 shows that Philips has high hopes for this diminutive set-up. Past and future meet in the juxtaposition of a Class D power amp with a 'Sound Enhancement Vacuum Tube Preamplifier', which is explained thus: "The analogue nature of the tubes provides a more pleasing sound to our non-linear hearing system". Aligned to a ribbon tweeter that "dramatically increases the width of the sound spectrum in the higher tones", and Philips claim the result is, "a harmonious blend of undistorted and uncoloured wide-ranging sound that's as smooth as silk."

It goes without saying that no classy product would be complete without its accessories. Whereas iTube owners have to make do with a brush and single glove (in the cause of cleanliness, naturally), Philips' defining accessory moment comes in the form of a leather-backed remote, whose "stylish, precision-cut keypad ensures a qualitative navigation experience. Feel the splendor of pure design and control".

Let there be no doubt – the venerable valve is making a large-scale comeback. In fact, so sure am I of the rosy future for this technology, that I can confidently predict that Santa's sack will be bursting with valve-powered, variable-speed executive pencil sharpeners and triode-driven Newton's cradles this Christmas. These ingenious devices will be driven by a push-pull, OTL output stage, the speed settings and user-selectable output-stage bias current, all of which can be set from the comfort of the owner's armchair thanks to a remote which features teak veneer and no less than three classic NOS Nuvistors.

Jon Marks has been happily addicted to hi-fi for 20 years, especially since becoming a member of the hi-fi press in the mid-1990s



Obsessive-compulsive

One man's struggle with Vertical Tracking Angle

My encounter with the Origin Live Encounter tonearm on the Calypso turntable this issue provoked a great deal of head scratching. For a while, it almost had me believing that something I'd thought

was a near irrelevance – Vertical Tracking Angle – could actually be really important.

Sorry, but I'm too old and set in my ways to have my world turned upside down like that. The VTA on my regular deck is set in my usual über-scrupulous manner: I squint at the arm tube, and then adjust it such that it is a few millimeters lower at the pivot end than it is at the cartridge end. The degree of slope towards the pivot is fine tuned by ear and takes but a few bars' worth of funk to decide upon: so long as there's a bass line, a vocal and hi-hat or some chopped guitar chords, it's easy to find the sweet spot. And that sweet spot is clearly universal in that it suits all my records.

Admittedly, you might detect slight differences on the odd disc or two, but fundamentally the musical performance stays consistent, reinforcing my long-held belief that VTA tweaking is more of a neurotic disorder than a significant process with any worthwhile merit. Hey, you're even going to get differences on the same disc if it deviates at all from perfect flatness. Now there's something for VTA obsessives to fret about!

The Origin Live combo, however, seemed initially to need its VTA adjusting on a per record basis to extract the required vibrancy and life from recordings, which concerned me. Then I discovered that a washer I'd fitted to the arm base should not have been there, and when I removed it, the apparent VTA sensitivity went with it. That got me thinking about how such a simple thing could affect the performance of a tonearm quite so dramatically. I contacted Origin Live's designer, Mark Baker, and he told me that it was a function of the Encounter's relatively undamped nature causing it to transmit energy away much faster than most arms, which makes its method of attachment more critical than most. I'm only guessing here, but I suspect that the VTA adjustments I was making (using a simple collar on the arm pillar) were having an effect because in so doing I was probably also altering the tightness of the arm fixing.

By removing the washer I no longer had to twiddle with the VTA, which delighted me no end. Quite apart from believing that VTA is nowhere near as important as some intense audiophiles would have you believe, there is a far more practical consideration: when I sit down with a glass of wine and a pile of vinyl, the last thing I want to be doing is messing with my tonearm and running the risk of a trashed cartridge just to hear a shade more 'air' round a triangle, an extra six-inches of soundstage depth or something equally as musically inconsequential.

Malcolm Steward was one of the country's best-known hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently publishes the hi-fi industry trade bible, the British Audio Journal

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

INTERFERENCE: THE ALIEN INVASION



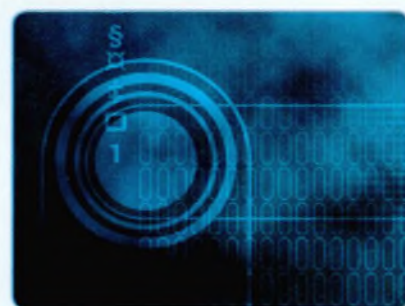
Many mains cables and filters claim to remove 'radio-frequency interference', and the same phenomenon is blamed for all sorts of ills in hi-fi. But what do we mean by the term – and even more puzzlingly, how does it have an effect on mains cables, of all things?

The term is a pretty accurate description. Interference, in the context of electronic signals, means any signal picked up from the environment that is not related to the 'wanted' signal. A familiar example is taxi radio picked up by a phono amplifier, or that familiar buzzing on a landline phone that tells you a mobile is ringing nearby. There are plenty of sources in interference, including regular radio broadcasting, mobile and cordless phones, Wi-fi, and more mundane sources like electric motors and thermostatic switches.

Most of those, though, have little or no energy in the audio spectrum. Wi-fi, for instance, uses frequencies in the gigahertz, some hundred thousand times the frequency of audio, and even humble long-wave radio is at least a factor of ten higher in frequency. Clearly, it's not as if the interference is simply picked up and amplified, then radiated direct from the speakers. What actually happens is that interfering signals are somehow 'demodulated' and turned into something that does have audio-frequency energy: the result may be comprehensible, as is the case with the taxi radio example, or it may be just low-level noise as will happen with modern digital interference sources.

Demodulation generally happens because of 'parasitic' radio circuits inside audio components. It's a fact of life in analogue electronics that circuits can often have unexpected behaviour at very high frequencies, far above the intended frequency of operation, and this behaviour is fundamentally non-linear, causing demodulation of signals and creating audio-band noise. It's rather ironic that if you want to make a circuit operate predictably at a high frequency you need to run it at a fairly high current, but if you make a very low-current audio circuit it's more likely to have parasitic high-frequency behaviour.

That's one problem. The other is that at very high frequencies signals don't necessarily



“Interference means any signal picked up from the environment that is not part of the ‘wanted’ signal.”

behave the same way as low-frequency ones. At low frequencies (including audio) a signal will run along a wire and be predictably attenuated by resistors, capacitors and other components in the path. At high frequencies that's not necessarily true, as signals can and will radiate across gaps and round components, and a piece of wire is a component in its own right too. Obviously, there are techniques for dealing with such signals, or radio appliances would never work, but they usually aren't applied in audio and as a result RF signals can be picked up on the screen of a cable, say, and conducted into a piece of equipment via what's supposed to be a 'ground' line, going on to cause all sorts of gremlinish stuff.

Even mains circuits aren't immune, because one piece of wire is just as good as another at picking up stray RF and the mains transformer may look nearly invisible to RF wandering in on the mains wire. It's worth noting that the much derided 'electromagnetic compatibility' (EMC) regulations introduced by official bodies over recent years have in fact led to a much better understanding of RF by manufacturers and a decrease in the occurrences of serious interference problems, but there's still a lot to be said for doing what one can to minimise interference effects in audio. Specialist cables can indeed be part of that **HFC**

Richard Black

The world according to...

Krell Industries

This month Hi-Fi Choice talks to the main man behind high-end American muscle-amp royalty, the king of Krell himself... **Dan D'Agostino**. Interview: Malcolm Steward

Dan D'Agostino is the co-founder and CEO of Krell, the American high-end company that's perhaps best known for building hugely powerful amplifiers. When asked about them once he quoted the Muhammad Ali catchphrase, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee..." When asked to explain what he meant by that, D'Agostino replied, "Ali was a very powerful boxer but he also had finesse. Anyone can build a powerful amplifier. The trick is building one that sounds good even at low levels." This ability to sound good at all levels has always been a key feature of Krell designs, right from the early days, back in the 1980s

We caught up recently with Mr Krell when he paid a flying visit to the UK during the London Sound & Vision show.

HFC: How did you make your way into the high-end business?

DD: When I was a child – around the time of the birth of hi-fi – my father was very much into music, and companies such as Marantz and McIntosh were becoming popular in the United States. He bought some of their components and I became interested. I started reading *Wireless World* and looking at how amplifiers were put together. The subject fascinated me, and my electric shop teacher encouraged this. He taught me how components and circuits worked and encouraged me to build something. I started with a *Wireless World* circuit – a Williamson push-pull tube amplifier. I got it working and brought it home to play through my father's hand-fabricated Klipschorn loudspeakers. It sounded really

good and that encouraged me to continue. When I finished school I started working in an audio store to learn about the equipment. Then I began repairing equipment at the store and before I knew it I was pretty heavily involved with the hi-fi industry.

I did a few jobs for some other companies, but I really had the most fun working in audio stores. I did a little work for Ira Gale way back in the 1970s – we worked on an amplifier for a long time, but he never wanted to make it a product – and then I worked for a New York company called Great White Whale for a little while, before deciding that I wanted to build a Class A amplifier, which seemed like the thing to do. I thought there was a niche in the marketplace for a really powerful Class A amplifier.

I designed one and played it to a friend who worked as a reviewer and asked him what he thought. He told me it was incredible. There were no other 100-watt Class A amplifiers around at the time and I thought I was on to something really good and ought to start a company, so I formed Krell with my then girlfriend. We started building amplifiers in September 1980 and showed our first three products in January 1981. We received enough orders at that show to scare us! We sold about 40 amplifiers and when we got home we looked at each other and said: "How are we going to build all these amplifiers?" Some of the folks in our neighbourhood came round and helped us. Somehow we turned what was a real cottage industry into a proper business.

HFC: Where does the company name come from? It sounds like a sci-fi reference.

DD: It came from the 1950's sci-fi movie, *The Forbidden Planet*. The Krell were beings with unlimited power.

HFC: That's appropriate because your amps have always seemed overly muscular, especially in the UK where 100 watts used to be PA territory. Why do you feel the need for so much power?

DD: I once read an article that was written by

"You can scale a big amplifier down but it's very much more difficult to scale a smaller amplifier up."



Julian Hirsch discussing how much power was needed to reproduce a piano, and that really influenced me. It was some extraordinary amount – 1,100 watts or thereabouts – through a pair of relatively inefficient AR speakers at listening levels, not concert levels. I began thinking that power was something that everybody was lacking and so I started building bigger and bigger power amplifiers.

I found that if I took the original KSA-100 circuit and made it bigger, it had more power but sounded worse. So, I knew that when I built a bigger amplifier it had to be something that was designed from the outset to be bigger: you can scale a big amplifier down but it's very much more difficult to scale a smaller amplifier up. The situation is something like having an oxen-drawn cart and attaching 10 more oxen to the front of it: okay, so it might pull a bigger load and it might go faster, but you'll still struggle to control it!

Once I'd got a power amplifier to sound exactly like the KSA-100 but to deliver about 600 watts, I realised that you really did need power to play music. Listening to the same music at the same levels, everything sounded more relaxed, more open and more musical through the bigger amplifier. That is why Krell pioneered trying to make really big amplifiers that sound musical.

The latest amplifiers, the Evolution series, represent 27 years of doing that. I think we've finally got to a point where we're building really big power amplifiers that are extremely musical. And they're solid-state – a lot of people wonder if they have tubes in them. We didn't aim for a tube sound because I'm not a big fan of the tube sound. I wanted something that played anything and provided all the micro detail that's possible in music today, and I think we've accomplished that aim.

HFC: Are your amplifiers still Class A? I doubt the environmentalists would approve if they were.

DD: No. Our new amplifiers are cascoded designs that use many pairs of transistors biased in individual groups such that they mimic – but aren't pure – Class A: can you imagine the heat produced by a 900-watt Class A amplifier, not to mention the power it would require? In practical terms, it's almost impossible to build a Class A amplifier producing more than 300 or 400 watts. Our current amplifiers are much more efficient than the older Class A designs.

HFC: When you sit down to design a new amplifier, what features are on your list of priorities for it – on the list of things you want it to achieve? I ask this because



No KIDDing as Digital Dan sizes up the iPod generation with Krell's take-no-prisoners dock.



When you switch to the voltage domain you add noise, gain and distortion. It occurred to me that we have such gorgeous current transforms, where signals are very linear and go up as far as 4MHz: the circuitry is awesome and we can't repeat that in the voltage domain because when we convert we have more dirt, less bandwidth and so on. So I said to myself, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could have the output of a CD player stay in current mode then go all the way through the power amplifier and only have one voltage gain stage in the whole system?" I started to think about it and then one of my engineers and I came up with this idea for transmitting the signal through the system in current. The output impedance of the preamp is 500K and the input impedance of the amplifier is five ohms, so you can run a kilometre of wire between them with no signal loss at all.

In a typical CD player and pre/power amplifier system, you'll have around seven voltage gain stages at least. In the same Krell system we have one. And remember that every time you add a voltage gain stage you add three to six dBs of noise and distortion – even if it's really low distortion you're still adding it. We only add voltage gain in the power amplifier so that we can drive loudspeakers. So when

HFC: What were your guiding principles when designing the KID?

DD: The iPod is really just a hard drive and, if you download an MP3, it has a certain sound that isn't great... but it doesn't necessarily have to be terrible. If you look at the iPod you'll find a dual differential output: we took that and ran it through a Krell current gain stage and a high-quality output stage, and we thought it sounded okay. We added tone controls – which often help with MP3s – and then we also realised that with an 80GB hard drive you can record quite a few CDs with no compression... and when you do that the thing sounds just like a CD.

HFC: Does your move into iPod territory indicate that we're going to see a Krell hard disk server soon?

DD: I'm certainly looking towards that possibility, although it would mean partnering because I don't want to get into the software side of things. If we found another company to take care of that, and we did the DACs and the output stages, then we could doubtless come up with a first-rate product.

HFC: You've just launched some dramatic looking loudspeakers; first the LAT-1000 and Revolution ranges, and now the Modulare. Could you tell us a little bit about the design ethos behind the Modulare?

DD: I wanted something that looked a little Bauhaus – industrial, simple. They probably won't be to everyone's taste, but someone who can appreciate industrial design and the fact that its function is its function. Aluminum is a wonderful material to work with because it's almost thoroughly non-resonant at frequencies you can hear. [*The cabinets – two per speaker comprising a two-way and a separate woofer tower – are made from 25mm thick panels of aluminium.*] There's no energy storage, so whatever sound comes out of the speakers is coming from the drivers not the cabinet. The cabinets don't vibrate with the music like so many speaker cabinets do. And if you take all those resonances out of the cabinet, all you're left with is the sound from the drive units. There's none of that field of distortion behind the music that most speakers produce.

With Dan D'Agostino's passion for the finest in audio now pushing the envelope of what the iPod can do and Krell's continued domination of the high-end market, it's clear the company is striving to create a new generation of audiophiles. On past performance, you wouldn't bet against Krell achieving this.

With that, Mr Krell poses for a photograph or two and then is gone, though not in quite the same dramatic fashion as the technologically advanced race from classic sci-fi, after which the company is named. **HFC**

“In a typical CD player and pre/power amp system, you'll have around seven voltage gain stages. In the same Krell system we have one.”

☞ the typical Krell sound – and the American high-end sound in general – seems to be quite different from what the British high-end sets out to deliver?

DD: I agree with that, although I tend to think that our latest group of products and some of the British designs I've heard recently are coming very close together.

My first check box would be sonic integrity. It would have to sound good without accenting any particular areas. Second, it would have to be reliable and consistent: a circuit that was 100 per cent repeatable so that every one I built would sound the same. Then I think the build quality and components would have to be as good as those I'm using now. I wouldn't want to change either of those aspects.

As far as circuit topology goes, I don't have anything in my brain that betters the Evolution product I just released. Although that's not to say that I won't!

HFC: Could you explain the CAST technology that features in your Evolution range?

JF: We've been working in the current domain: we believe that the fewer voltage gain stages you have in a circuit, the better off you are.

you listen to the system, you hear that the micro-dynamics and the low-level stuff are completely resolute. It's totally there and it comes from a black, dark area and the dynamic contrast is really extraordinary.

HFC: You've just introduced the KID iPod dock. Many keen hi-fi swimmers wouldn't even imagine that the iPod and Krell amplifiers could be happy bedfellows. How did the project come about?

DD: Well, friends with iPods used to come to my house and they always had some music on them that they wanted to hear on my big system. So one evening a friend and I went out and bought the most expensive dock we could find. It cost \$72! I plugged this thing in and the iPod sounded so-so, but at least we got to hear the music. Then I thought that I couldn't be the only guy with a big system who occasionally wanted to hear music from an iPod through it. And so I thought why not build a real component – with good build quality and technology – to do the job. At least it would let you hear the best signal that the iPod could produce.



C315BEE

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Hi-Fi News, U.K.

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Stereophile, U.S.A.

"Black Velvet...a big 5 stars"

Sound & Vision, Greece

"...OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD GOOD."

Tone audio, U.S.A.

"FIRST CLASS.."

Audio Review, Italy

"...from the first few notes, (you're) hooked.n"

Hi-Fi+, U.K.

"...what I heard blew me away."

The Audiophile Voice, U.S.A.

"A little champ of price/quality ratio: available at an affordable price, especially for a tube amplifier of more-than-usual power.."

Audio Review, Italy

"PrimaLuna ProLogue One is now my 'affordable reference amplifier'. With apologies to various British and Italian geniuses, this amplifier has to my ears no equals at its retail price."

Hi-Fi News, U.K.

"A refreshing change from the transistor competition with a captivating presentation. Excellent finish and build quality makes for a package strong on value."

Hi-Fi World, U.K.



Prologue1 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue2 40 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88



Prologue3 Dual Mono Valve Preamplifier



Prologue4 35 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Prologue5 35 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue6 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with EL34



Prologue7 70 Watts Stereo Amplifier with KT88



Prologue8 Valve CD Player



Dialogue1 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with EL34



Dialogue2 36 Watts Stereo Integrated Amplifier with KT88

PrimaLuna

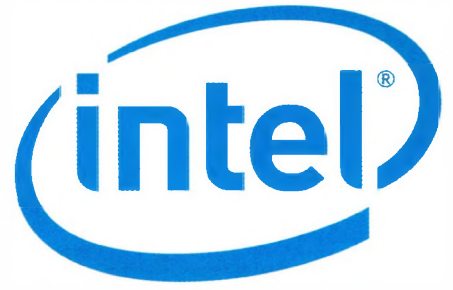
Music is a universal pleasure that should not be denied to anybody. So, too, the beauty of music reproduced by valves. To make available to a wider audience the seductive, silky sound of the vacuum tube, PrimaLuna has developed a range of all-valve amplifiers with the construction, power and sonic performance of high-end electronics, but with one unique, inimitable feature: prices that can only be described as 'entry level'!

Since the arrival last year of PrimaLuna's first model, the ProLogue One, the audio community has been unable to contain its joy nor reign in its praise, because PrimaLuna has revolutionized the whole concept of 'affordable audio.' Commencing with a pair of integrated amplifiers with prices more typical of mundane, solid-state products, PrimaLuna has shown other manufacturers that compromises in fit and finish, styling and facilities are unnecessary.

And PrimaLuna has shown the music lover that 'high end' performance and pride of ownership can be made available to aficionados on a budget. But don't take our word for it. Audition your preferred ProLogue or the newly-launched Dialogue models at the PISTOL Music dealer of your choice. And prepare your wallet for a pleasant surprise!

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RULES To enter you can either: (a) text your answer to 84383 at any time between 11 October 2007 and 1 January 2008; or (b) enter the competition online at the URL above between 11 October 2007 and 3 December 2007. By sending your text entry you agree to these competition rules. Answers must be received between 11 October 2007 and 1 January 2008. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received between the relevant dates and will be sent a set prize free of charge. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date and will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which the prize should be sent. Only UK residents aged 16 years and over may enter this competition. No employees of Future plc or any of its group companies or the employees of any entry that has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. Texts will be charged at £1 plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services of Future which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this information, please include the word "NO" at the end of your text message or postal entry.

CHOICE CUTS



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson

AUDIOPHILE VINYL



CHARLIE HADEN/ ANTONIO FORCIONE

Heartplay

Naim 180g vinyl

Music: Double-bass player Charlie Haden has played with Ornette Coleman and Keith Jarrett, so it's perhaps surprising to find him accompanying a relatively unknown guitar player on a hi-fi brand label. His presence certainly adds extra gravitas to what is a fairly sombre (but far from miserable) collection of tunes by Forcione.

Sound: Neutral, revealing and largely devoid of reverb, it doesn't sound overly open, but is highly convincing in a slightly dark fashion. **JK**

Music
Sound



JIMMY CLEVELAND

Introducing

EmArcy/Speakers Corner 180g vinyl

Music: Having played with Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie and Oliver Nelson, this is Cleveland's first album in his own name. He's generally a hard bop player, but this 1955 LP combines that with swing, which was more popular at the time. If you haven't considered the trombone as a lead instrument, Cleveland's skills should change your mind as he plays with as much variety and subtlety as any trumpeter.

Sound: As with all mono recordings you trade imaging for dynamics, but as with all Speakers Corner productions the transcription is superb. **JK**

Music
Sound

These LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure and Naim.
* www.purepleasurerecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



DEVENDRA BANHART

Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon xl

Music: Since making a name for himself with his 2002 debut, the nu-folk maven has proved inspiringly prolific. His fifth album contains 16 tracks that vary enormously in influence. There's epic 1970s rock on *Seahorse*, polyrhythmic samba on *Samba Vexillographica*, Yiddish comedy crossed with classic doo-wop on *Shabop Shalom*, folk reggae on *The Other Woman*, pop soul on *Lover* and much, much more.

Sound: Devendra set up a recording studio with members of his 'Hairy Fairy' touring band for the sessions, which retain the relaxed feel of a regular band, albeit one chained to its frontman's ever-changing muse. **DO**

Music
Sound



CARBON/SILICON

The Last Post Carbon Silicon CD

Music: Clash legend Mick Jones initially teamed up with Generation X's Tony James back in 2001, but it's taken five years for them to get their debut out. The sound is a pleasingly strong and buzzy blend of post-Clash riffs and tough modern beats. Riding over the top is Jones' defiant but edgy vocal. Hopefully, *The Last Post* won't be their last word.

Sound: Superbly mixed by studio wizard Bill Price, who's worked the dials for everyone from the Sex Pistols to Tom Jones. **PS**

Music
Sound



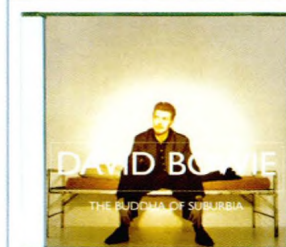
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Magic Columbia

Music: Reunited with the E Street Band, *Magic* finds Springsteen lauding the redemptive power of rock'n'roll. Dig a little deeper, though, and *Magic* reveals itself to be more thoughtful. Themes of innocence and experience haunt many of the songs, while on *Girls In Their Summer Clothes* he laments the cruel inevitability of the ageing process. In fact, he could probably have subtitled the album. "how to grow old gracefully, but keep rocking". And that's a magical achievement, indeed.

Sound: Brendan O'Brien's pumped-up production and the energy of the E Street Band dominate on initial hearings, but listen again and there's a subtlety to their swagger. **NW**

Music
Sound



DAVID BOWIE

The Buddha Of Suburbia Rhino

Music: Not the soundtrack to the TV series of the same name, but rather Bowie's 19th studio album from 1993, complete with former Guns N' Roses guitar-hitter, Slash, on-board. Over the course of the album Bowie mixes *Low/Heroes* era instrumentals with Mike Garson *Aladdin Sane* piano parts and plenty of excellent pop/rock like the hypnotic *Dead Against It*. A timely reminder of just how brilliant Bowie can be when he's on form.

Sound: Produced by famous Queen producer, David Richards, this has the metallic feel of early digital processing, and requires a decent system to really appreciate its depth and textures. **MP**

Music
Sound



NEIL YOUNG

Chrome Dreams II Reprise

Music: The title refers to a 1970s LP Young never got around to releasing, and the opening three numbers were all started and abandoned in the

1980s. Both *Beautiful Bluebird* and *Boxcar* sound better than most of his output from that dodgy decade. Also included is the 18-minute epic, *Ordinary People*, which we'll be kind and call stoic rather than boring. The rest are all new songs, the best of which are rockers *Dirty Old Man* and *No Hidden Path*.

Sound: It's all over the place - country ballads nestle alongside extended electric guitar wig-outs, and blazing horns give way to a children's choir. Of course, without such eccentricities, he wouldn't be Neil Young. **AG**

Music
Sound





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC

"Precision and power from the high priestess of punk."

PATTI SMITH *Gone Again* Arista

Music: This 1996 outing from the high priestess of punk is scorching testimony to her power and presence. Not as raw as her earlier works, it nonetheless delivers an equally forceful message with poetic lyrics and biting sound. It opens with scorching guitar and heavyweight bass, and while the intensity ebbs and flows

from track to track, the precision and lack of compromise are always apparent. There are three incredible tracks in *Southern Cross*, *About A Boy* and the darkly brooding *Fireflies* – all of which feature Tom Verlaine on guitar, while two also have contributions from Jeff Buckley in small but beautiful doses.

Sound: Production reveals the full power and bandwidth of Smith's tightly honed band. The bass is particularly gratuitous, creating an enveloping sound that completely absorbs the listener. *JK*

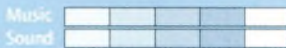


The songs have been boosted by some heavy duty indie collaborators including: Beck, Ron Sexsmith, Jamie Lidell, and Gonzales. That said, this is no exercise in indie head-scratching, but rather a collection of thoroughly engaging songs that flit between the amiable and the melancholic with alacrity – perfect for autumn evenings. **Sound:** The refreshingly uncompressed production allows full room to the choir, horns, harp, vibes and other instruments that support Feist's thrillingly clear and casually emotive voice. *DO*

FEIST

The Reminder Interscope

Music: Canadian songstress Leslie Feist's third album is a charming confection built on deceptively simple arrangements with killer hooks to spare.



HIGH-RES MUSIC

SIBELIUS SYMPHONY NO.2, POHJALA'S DAUGHTER

Sir Colin Davis (cond), LSO
SACD (stereo/ multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

LSO Live LSO0605

Music: A representative recording from Sir Colin Davis' *Sibelius* symphonic cycle, and far from the first recording of this work in his career, this performance is as convincing as any others committed to disc. The richness and colour, and the sonority and depth are all intact, along with accomplished playing. In fact, there's also a flow and unity of purpose about the playing that marks it out as a true great.

Sound: This recording is available as a CD or as a hybrid SACD. This is a proper DSD recording, not converted from PCM. With a price difference of just £3, our advice is to plump for the latter for its additional clarity, multichannel option and blazing sound which holds up through the *fortissimo* passages. *JK*



RAY SINGS, BASIE SWINGS

Ray Charles, Count Basie Orchestra
SACD (stereo/ multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Telarc

Music: First released on Starbucks' Hear Music label last year, this is actually a live mid-1970 vocal performance by Ray Charles, polished up and augmented by today's Count Basie Orchestra, which has carried on without its leader since the 1980s. It shouldn't really work, but technically, it's stitched brilliantly with no seams showing. If it doesn't perhaps swing with quite the passion of some genuine Ray collaborations, it certainly beats some of his lesser efforts and these versions of classics, like *I Can't Stop Loving You* and *Georgia On My Mind*, are well worth hearing. **Sound:** A technical marvel, there's no sip in the stitching throughout and the sound is gloriously open and engaging – if you didn't know the history, you'd never guess. *JK*



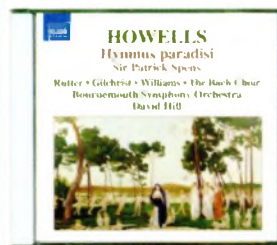
ELGAR

Cello Concerto, In Moonlight

Vernon Handley (cond), Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orch. EMI Classics 5014092

Music: Cellist Natalie Clein is the sister of string player and actress Louisa Clein, who won *BBC Young Musician of the Year* in 1994 with a performance of the main work on this disc. The minor pieces include the exquisitely phrased *Salut D'Amour* and *Chanson de Matin*.

Sound: There's something almost facile about Natalie's playing, as though the music happens without any apparent effort. This most personal of works, which marks the end of Elgar's most creative period, is here given a mature performance of great nobility and expressiveness, with great sound. *AG*



HERBERT HOWELLS

Sir Patrick Spens, Hymnus Paradisi

David Hill (cond), Bournemouth Symphony Orch, Bach Choir. Naxos B 570352

Music: Howells was arguably the finest 20th century composer of church music. *Sir Patrick Spens* is a brisk, complex and powerful work with immediate appeal, while *Hymnus Paradisi* is an altogether more subtle, elegiac work: a commemoration of the death of his nine-year-old son Michael from polo. It is, palpably, a masterpiece, but one whose qualities have happily been widely recognised.

Sound: The performance is as good as the music. It's a complex score, with committed playing from the BSO, and matching choral work of real distinction and power. *PS*



VARIOUS ARTISTS

A Unique Classical Guitar Collection
SACD (stereo/ multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Opus 3

Music: Various Artists is generally a loathsome term, but is used here as a handy catch-all for the talents of the Stockholm Guitar Quartet and Trio, Peder Riis and Duodecima. The 21 tracks open a fascinating window on the variety of interpretations available to the guitar. There are upbeat toe-tapping tunes by JS Bach, beautifully paced examples from Granados and the subtle nuances of Mendelssohn alongside pieces by Brahms, Debussy and Peterson-Berger.

Sound: The recordings here are from different eras (1970s to 1990s) and therefore vary somewhat, but are consistently open, dynamic and crisp, the earlier ones are less smooth but no less lively. *JK*



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HI-FI & HOME CINEMA

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CABLE CONFUSION

I understand different materials can be used to produce good interconnect cable and the results cause a warm, detailed, speedy, delayed, laid-back or forward sound, and also cause some losses either in the high, mid or low frequencies. I know this is not perfect, as it means cables only suit individual tastes, so could you explain how the different materials (such as copper, hyper-pure copper, silver-plated copper, through to silver/copper mix with gold and silver) influence the sound.

I know that the design of wire may affect the sound. However, the different materials must affect the sound in terms of the characteristics, too. I just wonder to what extent?

Jayric Tan via email

HFC You'll have to wait a little while, Jayric. We have just started a new series, called *Understanding...* to highlight what's what in key areas of hi-fi. The first of these features begins on p32 in this issue. Keep watching each issue, because many of your questions will be answered in a future edition.

GOLDEN EAR-WRONG

As we all know, it is in the best interests of all concerned that more women take an active interest in hi-fi. For too long now, hi-fi has been synonymous with Big Boys Toys.

The problem is women's jewellery! And earrings in particular. Well, it has to be, doesn't it? We spend loads isolating our equipment from vibration, reflection, refraction and deflection, and then, when you invite your better half to join in the experience of your efforts, you get that quizzical stare. Poor girl simply can't get a true rendition with all those waves and micro-whatsits bouncing and ringing off those metal shapes attached to her lugs. I mean, just imagine hanging a couple of bells on your speakers.

So chaps, this Christmas get out and buy her a pair of Sorbothane or Blu Tack earrings and maybe isolate her on a set of bathroom scales in your music room. It's the next big thing.

Stephen McDaid Barcelona, Spain

HFC Err... yeah. The only flaw in your argument is that hi-fi is particularly popular with pirates, who regularly swap Pieces o' Eight for top audiophile gear. And they all have big gold earrings... and parrots on their shoulders. The combination of reflectivity of said earring, coupled with the high-

"For too long now, hi-fi has been synonymous with Big Boys Toys."

frequency damage caused by endless near-field parrot squawking and cannonades should rob them of any need for hi-fi. And yet, shiver me timbers, if they all don't be a musicin' and an audiophilin' with ye fine, fine hi-fi round thar yon Windward Isles. Avarst ye, and yarr! ☑

Below: van den Hul CS122 cable



LETTER OF THE MONTH



IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO TODAY...

I visited the London Sound & Vision Show and couldn't help noticing two things. A lot of the show was dedicated to record players and valve amplifiers, and a lot of the people wandering round the show appeared to be in their late middle age. So, we had a lot of people born in the 1950s, listening to technologies developed in the 1950s. Which got me wondering – in 2057, will we have middle-aged people wandering round hi-fi shows devoted to iPods?

Martin Braine via email

HFC Haha. We hear what you're saying there, Martin. And yes, scary as it might sound, your scenario remains a distinct possibility, too. Although, that said, it's just as likely that the 2057 hi-fi show will comprise almost entirely of record players and valve amps, played to an audience of centenarians being pushed from room to room in plasma-powered hover-chairs. However, perhaps by that time, some of the vinyl die-hards will have mellowed to the sound of CD, too. Only so long as Hell freezes over and pigs are regularly seen in the skies, of course.



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The author of our letter of the month receives a one-metre pair of Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo interconnects worth £260, featuring a silver/gold conductor with Kapton insulation, plus a transparent Teflon jacket. So get writing! (150 words max please...)

ONE-BOX WORRIES

I've noticed that many hitherto separate companies seem intent on making a complete hi-fi in a box. The Arcam Solo is a perfect case in point, as it takes on the roles of CD player, tuner and amplifier in one. We were always warned against such one-box models in the past by many hi-fi magazines, because of poor sound and reliability issues. What's changed?

Brian Lowe via email

HFC One of the biggest changes has been in amplifier efficiency. The development of Class D means the amplifiers of one-box systems can now sound good without generating a lot of heat, or requiring a lot of power to run. In addition to this, much of the technology that goes into even very good CD players and tuners has been drastically reduced in size in recent years. These things have all combined to make a product that delivers good performance in a very small box, without the problem of excess heat shortening the life expectancy of the products.

HI-FI – THE NEXT GENERATION

My son is in danger of becoming even more of an audiophile than his father. He's already built two pairs of loudspeakers and a preamp, and he intends to build a power amp next year. He's studying for his GCSEs at the moment, and would love to design hi-fi for a living. Are there any university courses in the UK for hi-fi and what A-levels would he need?

ProudDad via email

HFC A good start would be to look towards a degree in electronic engineering, which would give him a thorough background in analogue and digital circuit design. The University of Essex has a commanding reputation in audio engineering, and its undergraduate BEng Electronics Engineering or Telecommunications Engineering degrees

reflect that. Typically, this sort of degree would require A-level mathematics as well as science/technology-based subjects. An alternative route might be the University of Kingston's Music Technology course, or the University of Surrey's Tonmeister course, although these courses are geared more toward audio recording than designing hi-fi. Both require a high degree of musical knowledge, with the Tonmeister course recommending A-levels in mathematics, physics and music, as well as a Grade Seven or Eight in musical performance.

DREARY DECADE

I read Jon Marks' *Dispatches* note (HFC 299) and felt sad. He is right that audio products aren't perhaps as 'vital' as they used to be, but some of the blame must surely be down to the samey artists and the production values of many discs.

Where are the super-groups, and the artists with high production values who make regular great albums? Over the last 40 or so years, we have been spoilt by great recorded sound and high production values, but even this took a back seat to fantastic music. Production wasn't a means to an end, but the producers/engineers were pushing the envelope, even developing a 'signature' sound.

Over the last 10 years, things have changed. The sound is overly compressed, and the mix overly complex. The scene today seems full of bland yet well produced – or good, but badly produced – music.

Where does that leave us? Does buying expensive hi-fi mean that you can only listen to classical, audiophile, 1970's rock and jazz, because anything modern sounds like tripe? Can we listen through the mess to hear great music? Or do we just give up and buy an iPod?

Andy White via email

HFC We aren't exactly in disagreement with you there, Andy. There does need to be a 'Third Way' (that sounds familiar, doesn't it?), somewhere between the musically satisfying but distinctly lo-fi sound produced by the likes of the White Stripes and audiophile-chummy, but musically unchallenging 'product' like James Blunt. Or, should we be happy with what we've got... what do YOU think?

SUB-SUBSONICS

I am an aficionado of organ music and recently I had the good fortune to hear a pair of TDL Reference Standard Transmission Line loudspeakers. I have never, ever heard anything to compare (aside from the real thing, of course). The loudspeaker even replayed the mighty Bourdon 16' at York Minster with room-shaking, heart-stopping intensity. I understand that this loudspeaker is no longer in production, but is there anything that comes close to this remarkable speaker design?

Clive Austin via email

HFC The TDL Reference was particularly strong at reproducing organ music; so much so, cynics often suggested that it was only good for organ works. With the speaker's passing, though, there are few models that come close to reproducing low organ notes. Those that come close include the PMC EB1 (a large transmission line design like the TDL, this time with a studio heritage) and the B&W 802D (also used extensively in studios). Both require powerful amplifiers to drive them, both are large, heavy designs and both cost a lot of money – £5,950 for the EB1, £8,000 for the 802D. However, if you are after bringing York Minster to your living room, nothing else will do.

“Can we listen through the mess to hear great music? Or do we just give up and buy an iPod?”



Above: Arcam Solo one-box CD system

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'The iQ5s are now, once again, star performers at the price: they're small, easy about positioning and partnering, and we reckon Monitor Audio's BR5s should worry. KEF obviously wants its crown back - and we suspect that's what the iQ5SEs are all about.'

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'Retuned, refined and fun!'

All quotes - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,
October 2007.



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Q S E R I E S

Understanding: POWER!

Kicking off our new series of technical features, here's everything you need know about power.

Many customers naively assume that the power rating of a hi-fi amplifier is some sort of measure of goodness. In fact, the whole question of 'power' – both electrical and acoustic – is infernally complicated, as the following article attempts to explain.

Look up the word 'power' in a dictionary and you'll find a wealth of different definitions, from politics to theology via mathematics. Science teachers used to define power as the 'rate of doing work', which certainly sounds a little closer to the electronics scene. However, as far as most hi-fi people are concerned, 'power' is a quality possessed by amplifiers that is measured in watts. Watts are the product of multiplying together the voltage (or potential difference, measured in volts) and the current (measured in amperes, or amps). Plumbing provides an excellent physical analogy: the voltage is equivalent to the water pressure; the diameter of the pipe is the current; so the actual rate at which water flows is equivalent to the power in watts.

All of the above is true, albeit a drastic oversimplification, because amplifier power is actually only one means to an ultimate end. It's just one of two possible stepping stones along the way to generating genuine and substantial Acoustic Power in the listening room, which is arguably the only kind of power we're really interested in. The other key element in the equation is the sensitivity of the speakers. This is measured in decibels per watt, and is effectively the conversion factor between the electrical power of the amplifier and the acoustic output of the speaker system. Although most loudspeaker sensitivities sit within a fairly narrow window, there are some quite dramatic exceptions, which we'll return to later.

SUPERCHARGING

The whole question of power and how much you do (or do not) need has been thrust to the fore since Musical Fidelity launched its

Supercharger amplifier initiative (see p48 of this issue for a full review). Little slide-rule-type Musical Fidelity giveaways entitled 'System Diagnostic' fell out of at least two of the monthly hi-fi magazines, promoting the case that

high-power amplifiers were an essential part of achieving true dynamic realism from a hi-fi system – immediately spawning a wealth of controversy within the online hi-fi community.

Whether one goes along with all its claims or





“As far as most hi-fi people are concerned, ‘power’ is a quality possessed by amplifiers that is measured in watts.”

not, Musical Fidelity's little calculator does at least set out and reveal the somewhat complex and frequently logarithmic relationship between amplifier power, speaker sensitivity, and the maximum loudness obtainable from a stereo system at a listening distance of around three metres in a typical room. For example, a typical combination of a 100W/channel amplifier feeding a pair of speakers with an average sensitivity of 88dB/W is able to generate a maximum sound level of around 101dB.

SETTING THE TARGET

Somewhat controversially, Musical Fidelity reckons that a maximum level of 101dB is just

below the borderline between ‘low’ and ‘medium’ quality. The Musical Fidelity calculator implies that maximum levels below 102dB (for a pair of speakers at the three metres listening position) imply ‘low quality’; 102-105dB represents ‘medium’ quality; 106dB and upwards ‘high’ quality. This begs the question whether ‘quality’ and ‘loudness capability’ are really synonymous.

In an ideal world and under ideal conditions, there's clearly some justification for the ability to achieve high 106dB+ sound levels. Twenty years ago, *Stereophile* editor John Atkinson measured tympani peaks of 106dB from the middle seating of the Royal Festival Hall, and levels at a live rock concert are likely to be 5-10dB

TABLE 1: REAL WORLD SOUND PRESSURE

130dB	Threshold of pain
120dB	Hearing damage (short exposure)
110dB	Rock concert
100dB	Classical orchestral concert
80dB	Loud hi-fi
60dB	Loud TV, or quiet hi-fi
40dB	Quiet conversation
20dB	Quiet room
0dB	Threshold of audibility

louder still. But do we really want to reproduce such realistically loud levels in our own homes? Maybe some of you do, but others don't. Perhaps you just want to wind the wick up occasionally, when no one else is home, and you're not expecting the doorbell or phone to ring.

In the concert hall, the first thing you do is turn off your mobile phone, before trying to make yourself comfortable in the cramped excuse for a seat. Once the performers appear, one's full focus and attention will be directed towards enjoying the music. Minimal distraction should ensure total involvement in the music.

The home hi-fi situation is very different, and while there may well be occasions when you want to shut your eyes and pretend you're at a concert, much more time is likely to be spent simply enjoying listening to one's music in a relatively casual way, and at the sort of levels that permit conversation. These levels are far, far lower than those required for ‘concert hall realism’, maybe by some 20dB (see Table 1). And if you need a 100-watt amp to play a system as loudly as 100dB, you only need one watt to generate 80dB. So I'll just repeat the litany I've trotted out many times before: “The first watt is the most important one.”

SPEAKER SENSITIVITY

Doubling the power of a system's amplification is actually the equivalent of increasing the sensitivity of the speaker by 3dB. This doesn't sound like much, but the range of sensitivities commonly found among commercial speakers nearly always falls between a low of 85dB/W and a high of 93dB – a spread of just 8dB. That 8dB spread corresponds to a change in amplifier power from 50W/ch for the 93dB/W speaker (giving peak levels of around 103dB), to 320W/ch for the 85dB/W model. Since the latter is likely to be small, you'll probably end up destroying it pretty quickly.

Furthermore, the measurement of speaker sensitivities is far more complex than a single figure suggests. We may express speaker sensitivities in dBs per watt, but to take that measurement as truly accurate implies that the speaker has a flat frequency response and also a flat eight ohms impedance trace, neither ☹

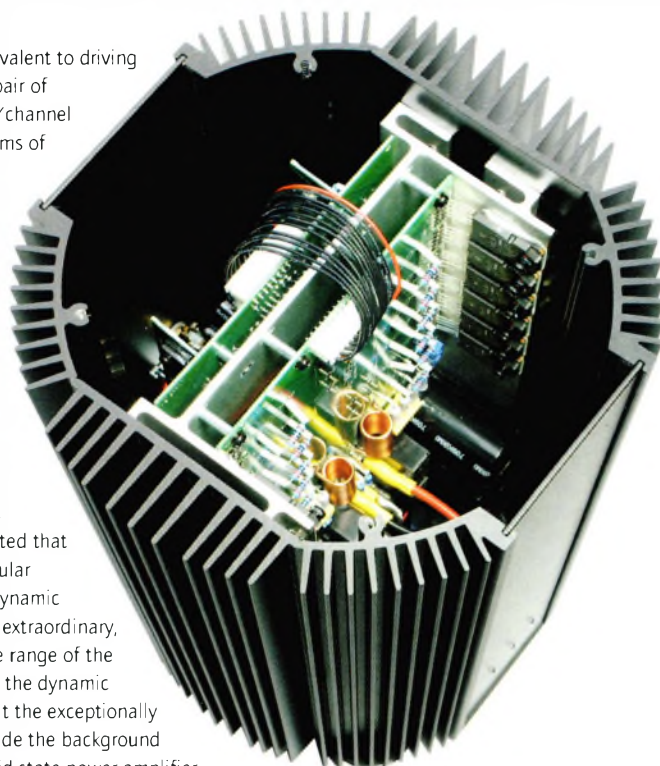
of which are found in the real world.

The higher sensitivity speakers are not only likely to be the floorstanders with several drive units, they're also liable to have a load that's closer to four ohms than eight ohms, and that exaggerates the sensitivity by 3dB in real terms. Although we express sensitivities in dBs per watt, we actually measure it in dBs per 2.83V, because when a 2.83V source is connected to a pure resistance of eight ohms, the result is a dissipation of one watt. Reduce that load to four ohms, and double the current will flow, resulting in a dissipation of two watts. By lowering the impedance, the speaker designer is pinching an extra 3dB of output by making life tough for the amplifier.

Although one can equate amplifier power and speaker sensitivity, the two experiences aren't quite the same subjectively. Although most speakers fall into the 85-93dB range, there are some exceptions. Horn-loading acts a little like the reflector behind a car headlight. Just as a headlight dramatically increases the light output in one direction at the expense of other directions, horn-loading delivers similarly dramatic increases in sensitivity in the listening zone. I recently got to try a part horn system (horn-loaded from 300Hz

That's notionally equivalent to driving an 'average' 88dB/W pair of speakers with a 500W/channel amplifier, at least in terms of achieving peak levels, though in practice the two approaches are so different (especially in terms of room drive) that any attempt to compare them breaks down. It's a bit like trying to compare a jet-powered land-speed record breaker with a Formula 1 car.

Two factors stood out strongly when I connected that horn speaker to my regular system. The speaker's dynamic performance was quite extraordinary, in terms of defining the range of the recording, and creating the dynamic tension and realism. But the exceptionally high sensitivity also made the background hiss of my powerful solid-state power amplifier far too audible.



Above: Musical Fidelity Supercharger

“Power amplifiers drive loudspeakers by creating an expanded voltage model of the signal from the sources and preamp.”

upwards, operating alongside active bass units), for which I measured a magnificent 108dB sensitivity – the highest figure I've ever encountered. (And yes, owner Horn Audio was successfully partnering it with a tiddly little single-ended one-valve one watt amplifier.)

MEANS, PEAKS AND CLIPPING

Amplifier power is deceptive. Power amplifiers drive loudspeakers by creating an expanded voltage model of the signal from the sources and preamp. The maximum voltage available – and hence the system's maximum level – is

determined by the voltage rails set up by the power supply, while the characteristics of the speaker being driven determine how much current the power supply and output devices have to supply.

An amplifier with an inadequate power supply might starve a low impedance speaker of current when it's being worked hard, but the consequences of trying to extract too much voltage are much more serious, especially with relatively high feedback solid-state amplifiers. This causes 'clipping', and the amplifier loses



Above: Unison Research Performance



control over the speaker. Returning to the plumbing analogy, it's like getting an air lock in the system. In fairness, some amplifiers 'clip' much more gracefully than others, and valve amps tend to cope better than transistor types.

However, the propensity to clip probably has more to do with the type of music being played than the amplifier. Most popular music has a limited dynamic range of just a handful of dBs,

whereas much classical material, especially solo piano, has a much wider peak-to-mean ratio. Crucially, it's the mean level that determines how loud the music sounds, but the peaks are the bits that drive the amplifier into clip. What this boils down to is simple: in reality, you need a much bigger amp for similar perceived loudness when playing classical material. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

TABLE 2: POWER FOR PEAK LEVELS

110dB	800W
100dB	80W
80dB	0.8W
60dB	0.008W
40dB	0.00008W



AWARDS '07



Ultimate Guide

Upgrade your speaker cable

"8PR has great bass – by some margin, the deepest and clearest of the group – and an effortless command of wide dynamic swings. Its detail is good and imaging highly creditable, while high treble is very open."

HiFi Choice magazine, November 2007

"It's a fast, involving cable, coming into its own when used with gutsy amplification driving speakers that revel in a good dollop of power."

What HiFi? Sound and Vision Ultimate Guide, October 2006



Kimber 8PR speaker cable £9 per metre
2.5m pair shown, fitted with bananas: £117

Find out more and buy now www.russandrews.com/8pr



AWARDS '07

Upgrade your interconnects

"It offered a most disconcerting improvement to the performance of several DACs with which we tried it. The old phrase about 'lifting of veils' comes to mind, with details, musical colours and imaging all revealed fresher than ever. Think of it as an integral part of a good, high-end DAC."

HiFi Choice Accessories Supplement, 2006



Kimber Select KS-2020 digital interconnect 0.75m £590
Find out more and buy now www.russandrews.com/2020



Want to know more? To request your copy of our **FREE catalogue** which is packed with tips, advice and unique products designed to get the very best from your Hi-Fi or Home Cinema, and a free copy of our quarterly magazine *Connected to Music and Movies*, go to www.russandrews.com/catalogue or call us on **0845 345 1550**

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REVIEWS



Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high-performance hi-fi in the world.

EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

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- 59** Heco Celan 300 loudspeaker



ROUND-UP

MAINS CABLES £125-£275

- 60** TCI Constrictor Powerblock
- 60** Atlas Ichor
- 61** Black Rhodium Polar Knight DCT
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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

CD PLAYERS £250-£600

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

Our overall conclusion after a leveler in tubes shone through. The Siemens equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidelity and ease. It even seems to be

You can find more civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this HFC.

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

A component receiving the coveted Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



Editor's Choice

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Aiming high

Monitor Audio sets its sights on the high-end hi-fi market with these luxurious floorstanders

PRODUCT Monitor Audio Platinum PL300

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £5,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 41x111.3x47cm
 • Weight: 43.8kg • Rear-vented three-way system
 • Impedance: 4 ohms (nominal) • Frequency response: 28Hz-100kHz

CONTACT ☎ 01268 740580 🌐 www.platinumseries.co.uk

There was a time when much of the very best loudspeaker technology emanated from the UK – but sadly, for the most part, those days are over. With the singular exception of B&W, most truly interesting and high-class loudspeaker design now comes from North America, the Far East and elsewhere in Europe. Of course, some companies design their products here and have them built over there – in the Far East, mainly – KEF being a prominent example. Monitor Audio is also associated with Far Eastern manufacture, albeit for cost reasons. Since Mo Iqbal relinquished the company's reins a decade or so ago, the brand has been principally involved with technologically conservative low- to mid-range loudspeakers, which might be described as 'mainstream affordable'. In the main we're talking about loudspeakers that don't sap amplifier resources unduly, and which are mostly reasonably compact and affordable, if sometimes a bit too sharply dressed to blend in with many domestic surroundings.

But here's a new departure for Monitor Audio – an unashamedly luxurious, technically ambitious loudspeaker that's the result of a 'blue sky' project, where decisions about materials and construction techniques have been made with a purist focus, and largely without regard to cost or technical difficulty. This marks the entry of the long-established brand into the high-end market.

The voice-matched Platinum range includes a smaller two-way derivative – which could be used either as a stereo speaker or as a rear speaker in a multichannel system – a centre-channel speaker that, technically speaking, is very closely related to the model tested here, plus the obligatory subwoofer, of course.

The aim for these models was to marry traditional British craftsmanship with what Monitor Audio describes as "benchmark" performance. This would appear to refer to consistent sound across the range, with greater refinement and musical integrity than with

previous efforts, as well as very low distortion and a considerably broader frequency coverage (>50kHz), appropriate to the bandwidths ushered in by media such as DVD-A, SACD, HD-DVD and Blu-ray. Responsibility for this ambitious project was assumed by a recently expanded team of acoustical engineers and

of the PL300 and the build of the main chassis itself shows a great deal of attention has been paid to this major parameter.

The standard of fit and finish on the model is nothing less than exquisite, and this includes the quality of the adjustable spiked feet, the WBT Platinum Signature bi-wire terminals and

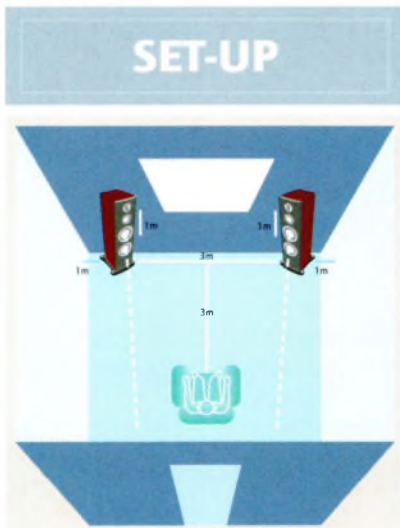
“Decisions about materials and construction techniques have been made largely without regard to cost or technical difficulty.”

industrial designers, led by technical director Dean Hartley and based in Rayleigh in Essex. Monitor Audio has also introduced in its own 3D modelling, finite-element simulation and a Klippel distortion-analysis system supported by an in-house anechoic chamber. This investment is clearly intended to pay further dividends with future projects.

The PL300 is an imposing loudspeaker, standing as it does at over 1.1 metres tall and set against broad shoulders and a deep cabinet. The side panels are alternatively bowed inwards (at the back) and outwards (at the sides) for resonance-control purposes. It's a three-way, four-driver design, with two identical 200mm bass drivers, a 100mm mid unit and – in a complete break with Monitor Audio practice, which has always previously favoured metal domes – a proprietary ribbon tweeter. Bass loading is via two rear-facing, rifled HiVe II high-speed vents. Front baffles, plinths and the midrange housings are cast from an anti-resonance composite (ARC) material, a thermoset polymer that's loaded with minerals to provide very inert, optimally damped assemblies. The ARC material is cast to form a tapered line enclosure for the Platinum's midrange driver. The main enclosure's front and rear panels have additional reinforcement from long steel support struts that are tightened to a specific torque as an additional resonance-control method. They're barely needed, however; the internal construction

the 11 layers of clear-gloss piano lacquer that highlight the wood grain. To add a little extra touch of luxury to the package, along with some additional damping (though this isn't its primary purpose), the baffle is upholstered in Strathspey leather, which is said to be superior to other leathers sometimes employed. ▣





POSITIONING

The first point to note is that the PL300 is unshielded, so if it's used in a multichannel context flanking a CRT display, there needs to be sufficient room between each unit to avoid any electromagnetic coupling. Of course, with the increasing popularity of flat panels, this is fast becoming a non-issue.

Other positioning criteria are more or less by the book, remembering that this is a large, wide-bandwidth speaker that inevitably interacts with room boundaries more than smaller speakers. Being rear-vented, it ideally needs to be about a metre from the rear wall (Monitor Audio suggests 0.5-1.5 metres) and at least a metre from the side walls. However, as usual, it's possible to trim the system balance through positioning. Increasing the distance to the rear wall will likely enhance the sense of image depth, while near-wall positioning improves the perception of bass weight. The PL300's more or less neutral overall tonality means extreme positioning measures shouldn't be necessary, though.

SYSTEM MATCHING

If positioning has a modest effect on the PL300's overall sound quality, that isn't true of the other components in the system. We were a bit surprised how much it reacted to the performance of the amp in particular, and to an extent also the disc player. The best overall match was achieved with Simaudio's Moon i-7 amp and Andromeda CD player, which together offer high resolution, a lot of raw grunt and beguiling midband warmth. But the Moons weren't available for long, so much of our remaining listening was done using Denon's flagship PMA-SA1 integrated amp and DCD-SA1 SACD player. Their uber-refined and detailed sound, especially with SACD, suited the system very well, though in some respects this set-up was a little less euphonious. In both cases, however, there was plenty of power available: the PL300 is more sensitive than many rival designs.



in similar applications. The woods used are Santos rosewood and natural ebony veneers.

The drive units clearly aren't from the standard Monitor Audio parts bin. All driver surfaces employ ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium (C-CAM). On the bass and midrange units, the cones consist of cores of Nomex honeycomb resins sandwiched between thin C-CAM layers, the concave cone profiles shaped with the aid of FEA analysis.

High frequencies are generated by a short and not excessively directional C-CAM alloy sandwich ribbon, with a neodymium rare-earth magnet. The ribbon doubles as the voice coil, and weighs just 18mg (less than half the weight of a typical high-performance dome), which helps account for the impressive 100kHz tweeter frequency-response limit, key to the speaker's ability to complement the new broad-

bandwidth formats.

The ribbon is also very



narrow, which means a wider than usual lateral dispersion, the limited height causing a more than usually curtailed vertical dispersion too.

SOUND QUALITY

This review was carried out shortly after moving to new premises, which of course meant a new listening room, with completely different acoustics to those this particular reviewer is accustomed to. The room is tall, moderately wide and about 12 metres long, so there's plenty of air to stir. We were told in advance that our review speakers were well travelled, having been used as demonstration models in other countries. In any event, we could detect no warm-up or running-in traumas that weren't directly attributable to the other components in the system.

In fact, there were no traumas of any kind, which compares favourably with most of the high-end speakers we've used in the recent past – though we suspect the Focal-JMLab Utopia Be (see *The Collection 2007*) would have been an interesting match, as well as offering even greater low-frequency bandwidth and maximum volume capability.

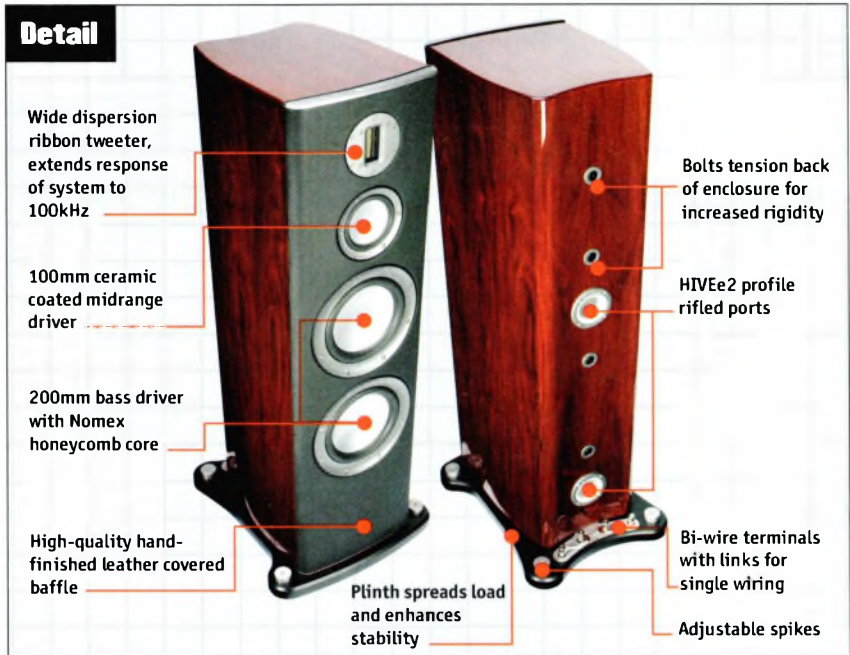
Not that the PL300 is particularly limited in either department. The bass is well extended and very clean and agile. It's more than capable of sustaining fortissimo orchestral playing with real power and authority, and its speed and agility are even more impressive than its sheer depth, though having said that, a smaller room would probably have thrown the spotlight more firmly on the low-frequency 'presence' end of the spectrum. But with the right music, performed properly, the PL300 can mount a musical picture of devastating authority and weight, without any noticeable overhang or excess.

However, it's in two other areas that this speaker is most impressive. First, there's the almost complete absence of coloration, and

the model's corresponding transparency. The only speakers that come close in this area are top-end electrostatics. The sound possesses a sharpness, clarity and precision, but with absolutely no detectable overhang. This is certainly linked to the very subtle discrimination the PL300 provides to high-frequency musical content, and the airiness that's often heard from top-class wide-bandwidth tweeters. In many ways it's suggestive of the performance of the Focal beryllium tweeter and the B&W diamond tweeter, which are certainly the best domes currently available.

The sounds of individual instruments are particularly well served, with a very subtle, tactile quality where the music demands it. For example, the individual strings on an acoustic guitar and glissandi from a harp – which, with poor reproduction quality, may be masked in orchestral recordings – are incredibly striking. The effect is nothing short of breathtaking, providing some real spine-tingling moments, in a way that you often hear in a live music event, but rarely encounter in the reproduced article. There's similar quality with one of this month's featured recordings, the Natalie Clein recording of Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, which from the first note brings the solo instrument to life in a remarkable and thoroughly tactile way. The electrostatic-like quality of this speaker, despite having no electrostatic transducer built in, was noted explicitly by a number of visitors.

The second area where the PL300 truly excels – even outshining other speakers with ribbon tweeters – is its dispersion. The tweeter has a broad lateral radiation pattern, which makes it more usable than expected – even well off the tweeter's main firing axis. There's some roll-off when listening from either side, as the PL300 can't repeal the laws of physics, but the change in voicing is remarkably modest with changes in incident angle, and there certainly isn't the marked 'hot seat' effect characteristic of ultra-wide-bandwidth domes. Unsurprisingly, there's more variation on the vertical axis, although it's not excessive, so that standing up



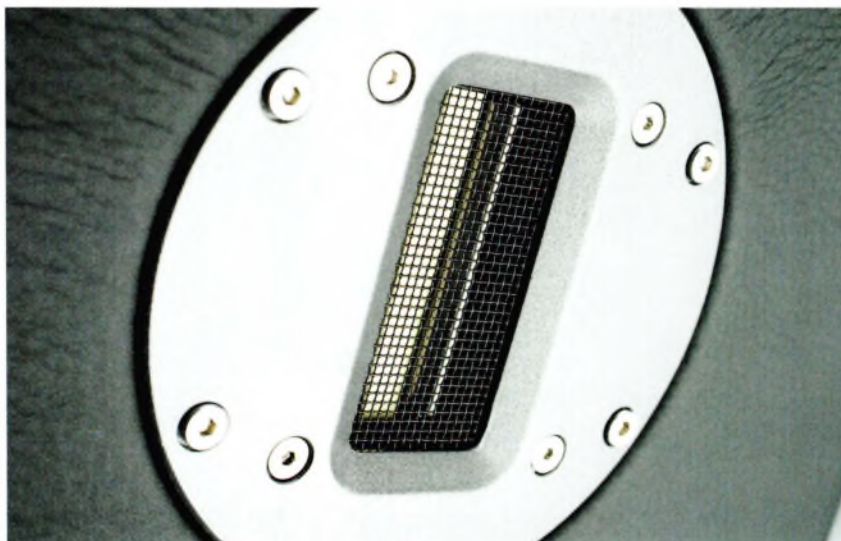
“The sounds of individual instruments are particularly well served, with a very subtle, tactile quality where the music demands it.”

and moving around the listening room while listening casually at least, doesn't result in any disproportionate change in voicing. There is a positive side effect here, which is that floor and ceiling reflections are effectively damped down. We noticed that a point in the room that tends to sound rather bright, apparently associated with a projecting RSJ strut running across the room, was less affected than usual using this Monitor Audio speaker.

Earlier on, we described the Platinum series as unashamedly luxurious, with the clear implication that they're also unashamedly expensive. Well, they're not cheap, but £5K for a pair of speakers of this complexity, build

quality and, above all, musical performance is far from extravagant. The overall musical effect is very expressive, airy and natural, with a clearly well-extended response, especially in the high treble. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 90%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 88%



PRO

Refined, detailed system which makes the most of high-performance sources and amplifiers, and which 'images' unusually well in large spaces.

CON

High resolution means special care is needed with system-matching – it'll show what's wrong with your system, as well as its strong points.

CONCLUSION

This is more than just the biggest and most costly Monitor Audio loudspeaker yet. It's a tribute to the skills of the design team, which hasn't previously shown much interest in the high end. It's also well priced.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%



Calypso music

A turntable combination where scrupulous set-up delivers huge performance rewards

PRODUCT Origin Live Calypso

TYPE Turntable

PRICE £1,470 (excluding arm)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 48x12x36cm

• Weight: 11 kg • Motor pod provides electronic speed change • Two plastic and one steel foot allow easy levelling • Comes with simple VTA adjuster for Rega and Origin Live tonearms

CONTACT ☎ 02380 578877 🌐 www.originlive.com

The Origin Live Calypso serves as a vivid reminder of just how simple life has become since we adopted digital sources. With a CD player, all one needs to do is take the thing out of the box, plug it in, slip a disc into a slot or drawer, push a button, and bingo – one has music. Life with the Calypso (or any other sophisticated record player for that matter) is a different ball game altogether. Setting up the turntable isn't difficult or

especially laborious, although we reckon it'll probably take you longer than the 15 minutes suggested by the instructions, particularly if this is your first venture into turntable set-up. And, as we discovered, set-up is crucial if you want to hear this deck perform at its best. Get it right and you'll be as happy as a pig in muck; get it wrong and you'll need to take the porker out of the equation.

The Calypso is a skeletal design without the complexities of a sprung sub-chassis. That said, once you've assembled it, levelled it, topped up its bearing with oil, fitted its tonearm and dressed the arm cable through the P-clip, you'll have to fiddle with the positioning of its separate motor pod and attach the round-section drive belt, which can be tricky till you acquire the knack.

Once you've reached this stage, all that's left is to fine-tune the adjustment of your arm and

cartridge and leave the deck running for a while to allow all its mechanical bits and pieces to bed in, and its circuitry to do whatever circuitry does during the early hours of its working life. Origin Live thoughtfully supplies a specially modified phono lead so that you can burn in your tonearm's wiring by feeding the output of a CD player through it. You need to do exactly what the instructions tell you and route the tonearm cable to a line-level input before you attempt the process – we certainly won't be held responsible for the outcome if you don't.

You might also like to check the rotational speed of the deck once you've settled on the correct motor-pod position – the one that puts the drive belt at the correct tension. Although judging what the correct tension is tends to be more a matter of experience than science, start by positioning the motor pulley 230mm away from the centre spindle on the platter.



“The first thing that’s noticeable about this turntable/arm combination is that it produces very little vinyl noise – always a good sign.”

The Calypso’s two motor speeds – 33rpm and 45rpm – can be fine-tuned if required by means of tiny screws reached through holes in the casing of the pod.

Our particular review sample came supplied with an Origin Live Encounter tonearm, though plenty of other options are available. Even to someone who has used a unipivot design for years, the Encounter might feel unnervingly delicate to begin with. The dual-pivot bearing allows movement in the horizontal axle in all directions except downwards. Although this can feel disconcerting, it’s a function of the design and you shouldn’t worry about it.

The arm fits into a Rega-style mount and a large nut around the arm pillar clamps it in place on the arm-board section of the chassis. The nut – despite looking like a suitable candidate for tightening with the largest wrench you can lay your hands on – should, according to Origin Live, only be nipped up finger-tight if you wish to avoid your music sounding ‘dead’. We followed the company’s advice, even though we found it disconcerting that the arm assembly could occasionally be

persuaded to rotate while placing the arm tube in its rest.

The arm comes with a Vertical Tracking Angle (VTA) adjuster. Now, depending on your point of view, VTA is either vitally important or really not worth the bother. Many believe in a ‘set it and forget it’ approach, whereby the tonearm is set up correctly on a typical LP and promptly forgotten about, while others are happy to spend hours tinkering with it to compensate for discs that are slightly thicker or thinner.

For the purposes of this review we used the popular, £250 Dynavector DV10X5 cartridge – a high-output moving-coil design that’s been around since 1978. The latest version benefits from an aluminum head block that securely attaches the cartridge to the tonearm. We followed importer Pear Audio’s recommendation to use the mounting hardware supplied with the cartridge rather than Allen bolts, which can foul the body.

SOUND QUALITY

The first thing that’s noticeable about this turntable/arm combination is that it produces

very little vinyl noise. Drop the cartridge into the groove and you’ll hear next to nothing, which is always a good sign.

With the deck, tonearm and cartridge properly set up, warmed up and bedded in, we decided to pull out some ‘old faithful’ recordings that could tell us in an instant whether our tinkering had been well spent. First up was Joni Mitchell’s *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter*, from the 1977 LP of the same name, which was chosen to see how the Calypso would handle her voice, the guitar play and the wonderful, percussive bass line supplied by Jaco Pastorius. This album, it transpired, would enjoy many visits to the deck as a benchmark while we investigated various tweaks to persuade the Calypso to deliver the consistently even-handed performance we ultimately achieved with it.

On its initial outing we got an essentially reasonable, but not especially inspiring portrayal: fundamental pace and timing were well conveyed, and the bass was satisfactorily articulated, although a little light in tone and muscle. Joni’s voice was also shallow and lacked body and depth. Similarly, the guitar seemed to be all strings and no body: the attack of the strings dominated the sound, with little or no warmth or character being contributed by the resonance of the wood to which they were attached.

So we adjusted the VTA, and were amazed by the difference this appeared to make. ▣

Q&A

Hi-Fi Choice caught up with Origin Live head honcho, Mark Baker, to ask him about the inspirations behind the Origin Live Calypso.



HFC Back in the 1980s you were designing turntable supports and loudspeakers: when did you progress to turntables and tonearms, and why?

MB Although we produced an award-winning stand, the market was difficult due to a saturation of functional stands – standing out, if you'll pardon the pun, was not easy. I was starting to get very interested in turntable design around 1989, even though at the time everyone was saying that they would be obsolete within a few years. The first decks and arms we produced got decent reviews, but failed to penetrate the market. My preference for vinyl over CD in terms of performance was such that we were going to stick with it regardless. It took nearly 10 years of hard work before we finally started to make real headway. Tonearms suddenly started to do well and, in addition to modifying Rega arms, we began making our own arms and decks from scratch. This was sub-contracted at first, but now we do all the CNC machining and finishing in-house.

The Calypso seems relatively immune to feedback and footfall, yet it appears to have no suspension. How is this achieved?

The suspension design of the Calypso is hidden under a large inertia disc. It effectively behaves as a cantilever. The sub-chassis is mounted on a heavy inertia disc, which in turn is mounted on a single small ring of compliant cork. We have experimented with springs and numerous other forms of suspension to arrive at this unique design.

The test set-up seemed highly sensitive to VTA adjustment and to the presence/absence of the washer beneath the fixing nut on the pillar. Why is it so sensitive?

The method of fastening the arm to the sub-chassis affects the energy path for the grounding of resonance in an arm. The Origin Live arms tend to be relatively undamped which means that they transmit energy away much faster than most arms rather than absorbing it slowly. As a consequence it is most important that the energy can get into the sub-chassis and be grounded. The method of attachment is therefore more critical than with most arms.

Do you have a preferred support for the turntable?

No. It depends a lot on the floor, really. Alphason makes good supports at an affordable price for most, in my view.

Detail



❑ Joni had added a body to her head and lost the nasality in her voice; the guitar strings had been reattached to the instruments and seemed far better balanced in the mix; and Jaco's fretless bass had gained more substance, along with the rich tonality associated with the 1962 Fender Jazz. The correction of these presentational oddities had a further benefit, in that it allowed the music's structure and flow to come through far more readily.

Buoyed by this success, we decided to address another potential concern: up until this point we had a washer fitted between the arm-board and the large nut on the base of the arm pillar (the instructions have now been modified to make it clear this washer should not be used with Origin Live's decks). What effect would removing this washer have on this unusually sensitive record player? It's fair to say that nothing could have prepared us for the dramatic – and across-the-board – improvement this simple act wrought.

Any criticisms regarding a lack of vitality and rhythmic bounce to the music – such as we'd noticed with tracks from Neneh Cherry's usually vibrant *Raw Like Sushi* album – were immediately nullified by discarding the washer. This simple act instantly transformed her performance from pedestrian to positively perky. Similarly, removing the washer also negated our observations of over-exuberance on tracks such as McCoy Tyner's *Prelude to a Kiss*, where his piano sounded far

too honky-tonk, but now sounded appropriately lively, with the previously noted wayward tonality now seeming to be controlled and more natural.

Best of all, though, dispensing with the washer also put an end to the constant need to fiddle with the VTA. All the albums played up to that point, which we'd criticised till the VTA was tweaked, now sounded fine without any adjustment.

We have to say we've never before come across a turntable-and-arm combination that's been this picky about its set-up. At some point we'd be keen to put the Calypso through its paces with another tonearm to see if it's the Encounter that's responsible for this super-sensitivity. In the meantime, this turntable gets the thumbs up it thoroughly deserves for the fine performance it provided in the end. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar]	PRO When properly set-up, the Calypso offers a delightful musical performance. It's also rather attractive if you're a fan of post-modernist looks.
FEATURES >> 75% [Progress bar]	CON The Calypso-Encounter partnership seems unduly fussy about its set-up, which is perhaps fine for enthusiasts but might be off-putting for turntable 'civilians'.
BUILD >> 75% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 77% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
If you're a patient and methodical sort, happy with turntable tinkering, the Calypso will reward. Whilst perhaps not an ideal deck for a first-time buyer, when correctly set up, the deck will delight with its looks, musicality and perky performance.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 78%



MEGALINE
EUPHONIA
• HELICON | 400 MK2
MENTOR
IKON
CONCEPT
SUBWOOFER



THE NEW DALI HELICON 400 MK2

Hybrid tweeter module | 2 x 6.5" driver
Bi-wiring terminal | 42-30,000 Hz
H1026 x W267 x D501 mm | 32.0 kg

FEATURES

- 2,5-way floor-stander with optional spikes included
- New terminals
- Matched real wood veneer in high-gloss Rosewood or Cherry finish
- Available as 7.1 system

"While this speaker's alluring good looks might make even a super model green with envy, its sound is better still."

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Wireless wonder

Wireless high fidelity is the Free speaker's USP, but does it deliver?

PRODUCT Free FS1

TYPE Wireless active loudspeaker

PRICE £3,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 15.9x87x26.8cm

⊕ Weight: 14.5kg ⊕ Active digital amplification

⊕ 150W/channel ⊕ Finish: satin black or white

● Wi-fi ready

CONTACT ☎ 0870 850 1337 🌐 www.freespeakers.eu

The Free speaker is so named not because it is given away *gratis*, but rather because it can be used 'free' of any unsightly loudspeaker cable. There are two reasons why it can do this. First, it's an active design, so it has an onboard power amplifier. And second, because it has a compartment in its base that can house a wireless receiver, such as those made by Apple and Sonos.

Being an active loudspeaker the amplifier does, of course, need mains power and this requires a power lead, so it's not entirely devoid of wires.

However, if you have a large room and maybe some floor boxes for AC then it's a neat solution because the Free houses all its connections in a recessed base, giving the impression of it being wireless.

The ability to use a Sonos system brings the speaker right into the 21st century too, as it allows you to select music stored on a computer or network attached storage (NAS) drive from a compact handset with volume control. The Sonos wireless distribution system is designed to access and transmit music from a computer or NAS drive to one or more audio systems. You can use it with a traditional hi-fi system by connecting a unit directly to the amplifier and using it to play music from your library of digitally stored music. The beauty of the system is that you can scroll through the music in the library from your armchair and queue it up just like a jukebox, or play a whole album or playlist. Prices start at £699 for a two-room ZP80/ZP80 system, while the Free speaker system requires a so-called ZP80 Bundle for £779.

The Apple Airport Express route is considerably less expensive than Sonos, although it can't daisy chain multiple pairs of FS1s around the home, nor does it offer the armchair access afforded by the Sonos Zone Controller – you need to select music from your Macintosh computer. Mind you, with Apple's Front Row system this is not particularly inconvenient if you have a laptop computer. You can also attach an iPod or a CD player directly to one speaker.

If you don't want to go down

the wireless route then the FS1 speakers can, of course, be used as traditional active speakers; simply hook them up to a preamplifier using a phono lead.

The FS1 is manufactured for Free's parent company SMC (run by custom install guru, Steve Moore) by PMC and is based on PMC's own GB1 model. However, as the FS1 vents through the base, the transmission line is a different shape to that of the GB1. The FS1 also uses higher density foams, which produces lower overall distortion. This is a good thing too, because a pair of GB1s will cost you £1,145 – albeit without the active element of electronic crossovers and amplifiers.

The FS1's amplifier has been specially developed for Free and differs from the type found in PMC's larger active designs. It's an analogue-controlled Class D design based on the Hypex module we encountered in Meridian's G95 multichannel receiver/player. It has a linear, rather than switched mode, power supply (which is often found in Class D designs), and delivers 50 watts to the tweeter and 100 watts to the bass driver. The crossover is done in DSP, which allows for a very steep fourth-order roll-off between drivers, but does, of course, require the signal to be converted to 24-bit/96kHz at the input.

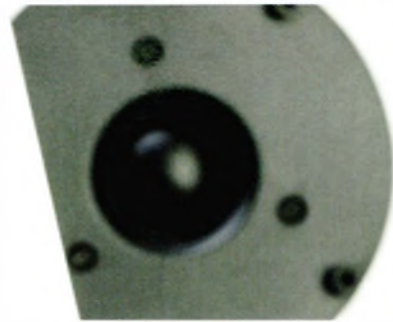
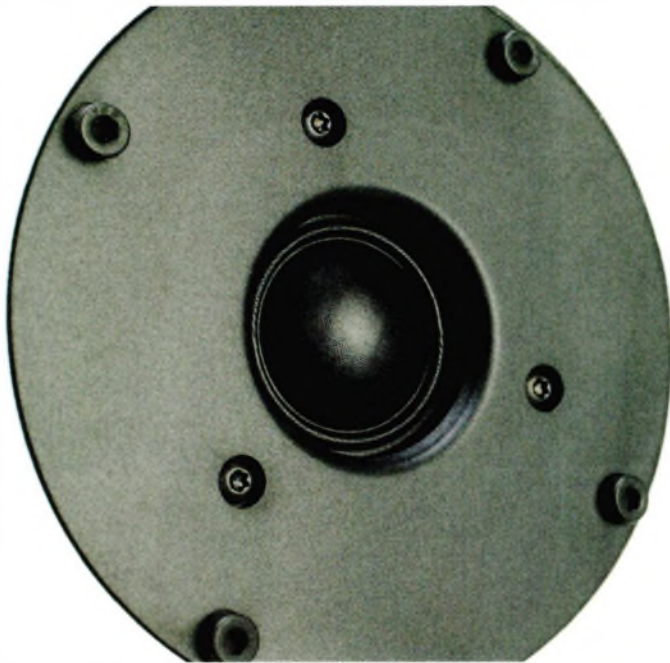
The speaker itself uses a 95mm doped cone bass driver in a cast aluminium chassis alongside a 27mm soft dome tweeter. Connections in the base are for phono and Ethernet cables and AC mains at 115V or 230V. Inside the wireless void are all the connections needed for a Sonos ZP80 or Apple Airport Express.

What also distinguishes the FS1 is the attention to design detail; the badge is very subtly placed on the corner of the grille and the grille attaches magnetically, so there are no lug holes when it's removed. The spike-mount feet are also very neatly attached.

PERFORMANCE

The FS1 has a lot of the PMC about it, which is hardly surprising really. However, the amplifier is not a variety we've encountered in an active speaker before and might, therefore be expected to leave its own imprint. Used as a traditional active speaker, straight out of the box with a Russ Andrews HP-1 preamp and Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player, the Free delivers an upbeat, taut and crisp sound that reflects well upon just about everything you play through it. It's hard to separate amp and speaker, but judging by passive PMCs of yore we'd say that





“At high volume the speaker doesn’t seem to show any strain, even though it is quite compact. The FS1 can shift quite a lot of air.”

the amplifier is probably the source of crispness in the balance. PMCs are generally very open and keen speakers, but because they are fairly transparent, they also tend to reveal the nature of the amplifier in use.

To be frank, we thoroughly enjoyed the FS1. It has superb grip in the bottom end, rather more than one expects of a four-inch driver in fact, but then that’s the charm of active operation combined with the company’s transmission-line loading system. Another PMC trait can be heard if you turn the volume up, where things get even more entertaining. At high volume the speaker doesn’t seem to show any strain, even though it is essentially quite compact. The FS1 can shift quite a lot of air when used with sufficiently hooligan-esque vinyl.

But, fear not. Although the satin-white finish does disguise a potential bruiser, it is also sensitive to the finer points of more sophisticated music. Fed such material it resolves different instruments in the mix extremely well, bringing out quieter lines in the music for you to follow if you care to. It is not what one would call refined sound, but it is extremely revealing without being bright or glassy. It’s analytical, yes, but it doesn’t get in the way of the music, thanks to a spritely sense of timing and strong hold on the dynamic contrasts. When the sound

swells it does so in a clean and clear manner. It does pin-drop silence rather well, too. For example, it was able to recreate the electric atmosphere at Keith Jarrett’s Carnegie Hall concert with considerable emotional power.

Listening to the same music in Apple Lossless format via a Macintosh G5 and Sonos makes for quite a dramatic drop in quality, though, as the sparkle, transparency and dynamics disappear. This is too revealing a speaker not to tell you as much. Taken on its own without comparison, however, this route delivers a highly enjoyable and entertaining result that is more than good enough for the sort of casual listening that’s intended. The multiple connection options on the FS1 allow you to switch between a

jukebox-style operation and a dedicated listening system at the flick of a switch under each speaker. Fortunately, this switch can be accessed without having to lift the speaker off the floor.

The Free FS1 represents the upper end of a new generation of loudspeakers; it can provide high fidelity for an air guitar-flailing listening session, and it also provides easy access to digitally stored music. At present there is no exact competitor that we know of,

but designs like AVI’s active ADM9, while not having an internal void for a wireless device, can be used in the same way with a little bit of cabling, and at some saving over the FS1. What the Free offers that appears to be unique is contemporary styling and huge flexibility of operation, combined with great sound quality – plenty enough to make it worth a look. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



FEATURES >> 95%



BUILD >> 84%



VALUE >> 82%



PRO

Taut, crisp and boasting an impressively wide bandwidth for its size, the FS1 is a great speaker even before you add the style and wi-fi elements. It’s also the easiest to install multiroom speaker we’ve seen.

CON

It’s expensive for a speaker of this size and power, while the need for mains power means you need well-placed sockets.

CONCLUSION

The FS1 offers a very tidy and elegant solution to those seeking good sound without cables. You pay a premium for the ease and style in which the Free achieves this, and if you don’t need the wireless element this level of sound quality could be had for less.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **87%**



Blower booster

Musical Fidelity's new high-power monoblocks are cleverly configured to Supercharge your existing system

PRODUCT Musical Fidelity 550K Supercharger

TYPE Monoblock power amplifier

PRICE £2,998 stereo pair (£1,499 each)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 21.5x40.4x22.0cm

• Weight: 12.1kg • Rated power: 550W/8ohms, 750W/4ohms • Line- or speaker-level inputs
• Signal sensing auto on

CONTACT ☎ 0870 4441044 🌐 www.bryston.ca

Supercharger. It's a word that has an undoubtedly romantic ring, reminiscent of the Hon. Henry Birkin and his Bentley Boys, sweeping their way to four successive Le

Mans victories in the 1920s. However, the automotive engineering reality is actually a little more prosaic, with the 'charge' simply being the explosive air/fuel mixture that's fed into the engine, and the 'super' referring to the process whereby the air is pressurised with a fan to get more 'charge' into the engine, thus increasing its power.

The analogy with hi-fi may seem a little obscure, though it's not hard to understand why Musical Fidelity's marketing department has come up with the 'Supercharger' tag, for a component that does, at least to some extent,

offer a new concept in power amplification.

Of course, to the less romantically inclined, the 550K is simply a high-power monoblock power amplifier. To Musical Fidelity's patron, Antony Michaelson, however, it can also be seen as an excellent opportunity to 'supercharge' your existing system, enabling it to deliver truly realistic musical dynamics.

To achieve this chameleon role, each monoblock unit is equipped with a 'normal' line-level RCA phono socket input, alongside a high-level input that's accessed via a pair of speaker terminals. The 550K can therefore be



used as a regular power amplifier, fed from a preamplifier, passive system controller, or a variable output CD player. However, for its intended Supercharger role, the 550K needs to be located close to the loudspeakers. The speaker cables are then disconnected from the speaker and reconnected to the 550K, while the extra speaker cables that are supplied with the amp are connected to the speakers. Find somewhere to plug in the IEC mains lead and, hey presto, the system now has more than 550 watts of power. Inserting the complexity of an extra power amplifier into the hi-fi chain might not sound a particularly good idea from a transparency angle, but a compensating advantage is that the less-powerful system amplifier is freed from the relatively difficult task of driving a complex loudspeaker load. Driving the 550K's resistive (approximately 55ohm) input should make its life significantly easier.

It's tempting to ask why anyone should need – or even want – that sort of power? Some would argue that hi-fi's true purpose is the replication of live music in one's living room, and while that might sound philosophically appealing, one can question whether it stands up to practical scrutiny. While it's reasonable to suggest that it might be feasible to pretend a soloist is performing in one's lounge, it's clearly unrealistic to mimic a symphony orchestra or rock group. Nonetheless, one can fairly argue that a more realistic target is to match the sound levels found in a live venue, which can certainly be very loud (105-110dB is a good target range). There's a significant difference, however, between generating realistic levels in a large space like a concert hall or the open air, and doing so within the confines of a small room.

Musical Fidelity makes a pretty good case for using a high-power amplifier on a number of grounds, in particular stressing the desirability of being able to generate realistic levels without any risk of causing clipping on dynamic peaks.

However, it's also the case that personal taste plays a role. We don't all live in solid, detached dwellings that permit realistically high levels, and personal taste in music also varies enormously. For example, most popular music has a relatively small dynamic range of only a handful of decibels, whereas an accurately recorded solo piano has a huge peak-to-mean ratio, and therefore requires a much larger

are able to handle, and the power supply capable of delivering, sufficient current. Since each 550K has twelve output devices and a 620VA transformer, that shouldn't be a problem: the spec claims a rated power of 550W/8ohms, 750W/4ohms.

SOUND QUALITY

Inserting the 550Ks into our regular reference

“There’s a significant difference between generating realistic levels in a large space and within the confines of a small room.”

amplifier to avoid clipping on the peaks while still maintaining a good mean level.

Features are limited to a signal-sensing 'auto-on' circuit that reverts to a low consumption stand-by when not in use, plus three little status indicator lights. Single-speaker terminal pairs are used for both input and output, with no provision for bi-wiring. Within the Musical Fidelity product portfolio, it's closely related to the kW550 – a two-box stereo integrated amplifier that separates the power supplies from the amplifier proper. The 550K effectively re-packages one of the power amp sections with an associated power supply, while omitting the preamp circuitry.

How is this amplifier able to generate so much power? Basically, because it's two amplifiers in one, operating in bridged mode, fully balanced and with a floating earth. By bridging two amplifiers, the available voltage swing is doubled: double the voltage across a load and you double the current that flows through it. However, since power is voltage multiplied by current, the power output is actually quadrupled. By this means, two 150-watt amplifiers bridged together become one 600-watt unit, provided the output devices

system provided some sound quality clues, but hardly makes for an appropriate overall system package. Although the 550K makes good sense as a device for driving the difficult load represented by Bowers & Wilkins 800Ds (which are themselves well capable of handling a kilowatt or so of power), inserting a £3,000 power amp after our regular £10,000 Naim NAP500 would seem a potentially retrograde step. While the 550K does seem to add a little extra power and headroom (theoretically, it offers about 6dB, which is useful though not enormous), it also added some of its own character to the sound, losing some of the top end sparkle and adding a little extra heaviness low down. A minor practical consideration is that the amplifier's 6dB gain might well cramp the bottom end of the volume control range a little, and exaggerate any background hiss present in the system amp's output stage.

A much more logical partner was our venerable, but recently restored and much revered Leak Stereo 20 – a valve amp with a very fine sound quality. Like many valve amps it's distinctly underpowered, and is therefore an ideal candidate for supercharging. It also imposes a degree of its own character on

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Q&A

We spoke to Musical Fidelity founder, Antony Michaelson, about the K550 Supercharger.



HFC Do you agree that the main advantage of the Supercharger lies with material with a high peak-to-mean ratio? If so, could you identify the sort of music most likely to benefit?

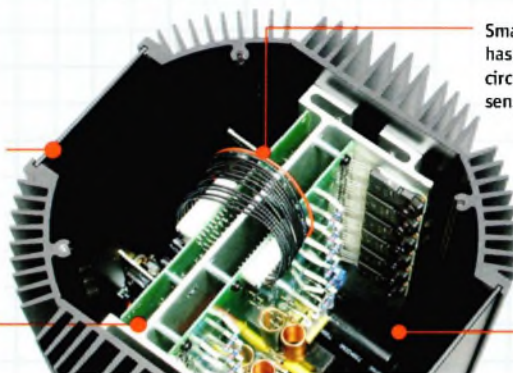
Detail

Cylindrical casework acts as a heatsink

Alloy bridge acts as mounting platform for two PCBs

Smaller internal space has board with input circuitry, auto-on signal sensing etc

Power supply capacitors



Active revolution

AVI's new powered standmount sparks a coup in computer audio

PRODUCT AVI ADM9

TYPE Active standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20x30x26cm

⊙ Weight: 9kg ⊙ 25mm soft dome tweeter with built-in 100 watt amp ⊙ 165mm composite paper cone woofer with built-in 250 watt amp ⊙ USB digital and stereo analogue phono inputs ⊙ Analogue outputs to subwoofer and slave

CONTACT ☎ 01453 834422 @ www.avihifi.com

AVI is moving inexorably away from being simply one of the better names in hi-fi. Although AVI still produces its standard – and very well received – range of electronics and loudspeakers, it seems that the company is now intent on leading the charge in bringing computer music into our little fold and, in the process, raising the standards for computer audio in general. The forward observer for this conquest of digital downloads was the little Active Neutron loudspeaker (tested in *HFC* 288), however this merely surveyed the battleground

for digital's true champion, the ADM9.

On quick inspection, the ADM9 looks and feels like little more than a good, solid stereo standmount speaker, albeit one with active amps built in. The front-ported two-way with its 25mm soft dome tweeter and the 165mm paper cone bass unit looks surprisingly traditional and works best on 60cm stands when positioned about half a metre away from the side and rear walls. That said, the ADM9 remains firmly in the 'not fussy' camp when it comes to placement. You could happily plonk them on a bookshelf and still get most of the performance you will get from obsessive 'quarter of a millimetre to the left, please' type installations.

A closer look at the ADM9 reveals some differences from ordinary standmounts, though. The first difference is found in the amplifiers behind those two drive units; two bipolar designs, the first being a 100 watt model for the tweeter, with a 250 watt unit for the bass driver and an active fourth-order crossover sitting in front of them.

Look closely at the back of the right-hand

speaker and you'll see the rear panel has five solid gold-plated phono sockets (with just one in the left speaker). One of these connects the left and right speakers together, and a five-metre length of phono-to-phono cable is supplied for this purpose. Two of the connectors act as inputs for an analogue line source, while the other two are outputs for a slaved speaker and a subwoofer (a matching subwoofer with a front-firing 250mm bass unit is also available). The speaker also includes a rudimentary one-source preamplifier, which can be controlled by using One For All's Audio Zapper remote control that comes supplied with the ADM9. The controls on the Zapper are limited to volume up and down, mute and source selection, however these are standard Philips RC5 commands if you want to invest in a more fancy remote.

A one-source analogue input active speaker is not going to drive the digital download revolution on its own, but that all changes with the strange square socket marked 'digital input'. This is a USB 1.1 socket and behind it sits a Burr-Brown digital converter. And it's here that AVI has been doubly canny. The USB port allows you to access anything that is digitally recorded and stored on a PC or Macintosh, be it a quick download of the new Killers song whipped off iTunes, a carefully worked Exact Audio Copy-enhanced, AccurateRip-validated bit-for-bit recording of your CDs stored on your computer, or even a FLAC-encoded Studio Master from Linn.

The 'doubly canny' bit comes in when you connect an analogue source to the ADM9, as it allows the USB port to pass those analogue signals back through to the computer, for ripping and storage. In other words, if you have a good record deck and phono stage, the USB-equipped ADM9 will turn those two into an analogue remastering centre. A Toslink-only version of the ADM9 (sporting a Wolfson DAC) is also available for those still married to 'tradition' and CD inputs, but you lose the record facility in the process.





used as a regular power amplifier, fed from a preamplifier, passive system controller, or a variable output CD player. However, for its intended Supercharger role, the 550K needs to be located close to the loudspeakers. The speaker cables are then disconnected from the speaker and reconnected to the 550K, while the extra speaker cables that are supplied with the amp are connected to the speakers. Find somewhere to plug in the IEC mains lead and, hey presto, the system now has more than 550 watts of power. Inserting the complexity of an extra power amplifier into the hi-fi chain might not sound a particularly good idea from a transparency angle, but a compensating advantage is that the less-powerful system amplifier is freed from the relatively difficult task of driving a complex loudspeaker load. Driving the 550K's resistive (approximately 55ohm) input should make its life significantly easier.

It's tempting to ask why anyone should need – or even want – that sort of power? Some would argue that hi-fi's true purpose is the replication of live music in one's living room, and while that might sound philosophically appealing, one can question whether it stands up to practical scrutiny. While it's reasonable to suggest that it might be feasible to pretend a soloist is performing in one's lounge, it's clearly unrealistic to mimic a symphony orchestra or rock group. Nonetheless, one can fairly argue that a more realistic target is to match the sound levels found in a live venue, which can certainly be very loud (105-110dB is a good target range). There's a significant difference, however, between generating realistic levels in a large space like a concert hall or the open air, and doing so within the confines of a small room.

Musical Fidelity makes a pretty good case for using a high-power amplifier on a number of grounds, in particular stressing the desirability of being able to generate realistic levels without any risk of causing clipping on dynamic peaks.

However, it's also the case that personal taste plays a role. We don't all live in solid, detached dwellings that permit realistically high levels, and personal taste in music also varies enormously. For example, most popular music has a relatively small dynamic range of only a handful of decibels, whereas an accurately recorded solo piano has a huge peak-to-mean ratio, and therefore requires a much larger

are able to handle, and the power supply capable of delivering, sufficient current. Since each 550K has twelve output devices and a 620VA transformer, that shouldn't be a problem: the spec claims a rated power of 550W/8ohms, 750W/4ohms

SOUND QUALITY

Inserting the 550Ks into our regular reference

“There's a significant difference between generating realistic levels in a large space and within the confines of a small room.”

amplifier to avoid clipping on the peaks while still maintaining a good mean level.

Features are limited to a signal-sensing 'auto-on' circuit that reverts to a low consumption stand-by when not in use, plus three little status indicator lights. Single-speaker terminal pairs are used for both input and output, with no provision for bi-wiring. Within the Musical Fidelity product portfolio, it's closely related to the kW550 – a two-box stereo integrated amplifier that separates the power supplies from the amplifier proper. The 550K effectively re-packages one of the power amp sections with an associated power supply, while omitting the preamp circuitry.

How is this amplifier able to generate so much power? Basically, because it's two amplifiers in one, operating in bridged mode, fully balanced and with a floating earth. By bridging two amplifiers, the available voltage swing is doubled: double the voltage across a load and you double the current that flows through it. However, since power is voltage multiplied by current, the power output is actually quadrupled. By this means, two 150-watt amplifiers bridged together become one 600-watt unit, provided the output devices

system provided some sound quality clues, but hardly makes for an appropriate overall system package. Although the 550K makes good sense as a device for driving the difficult load represented by Bowers & Wilkins 800Ds (which are themselves well capable of handling a kilowatt or so of power), inserting a £3,000 power amp after our regular £10,000 Naim NAP500 would seem a potentially retrograde step. While the 550K does seem to add a little extra power and headroom (theoretically, it offers about 6dB, which is useful though not enormous), it also added some of its own character to the sound, losing some of the top end sparkle and adding a little extra heaviness low down. A minor practical consideration is that the amplifier's 6dB gain might well cramp the bottom end of the volume control range a little, and exaggerate any background hiss present in the system amp's output stage.

A much more logical partner was our venerable, but recently restored and much revered Leak Stereo 20 – a valve amp with a very fine sound quality. Like many valve amps it's distinctly underpowered, and is therefore an ideal candidate for supercharging. It also imposes a degree of its own character on ▶

Q&A

We spoke to Musical Fidelity founder, Antony Michaelson, about the K550 Supercharger.



HFC Do you agree that the main advantage of the Supercharger lies with material with a high peak-to-mean ratio? If so, could you identify the sort of music most likely to benefit?

AF Logically, you would expect that the Supercharger is only necessary with wide dynamic range music. If you listen quietly, have sensitive loudspeakers, or listen to 'intimate' types of music, then you're unlikely to need the huge increase of dynamic range. Any music which has heavy percussion, brass instruments or large scale orchestral dynamics will use surprising amounts of power on leading-edge transients. However, reproduction of music which doesn't use anywhere near the 550K's full power does sound better with the Supercharger in circuit. I find it hard to believe that 50- or 100-watt amplifiers can't deliver that power into loudspeakers, and yet with the Supercharger attached the sound is improved. Perhaps this is to do with the quality of the 550K's circuitry.

Your Supercharger concept is, to the best of my knowledge, unique. Do you expect any other brands to launch similar products?

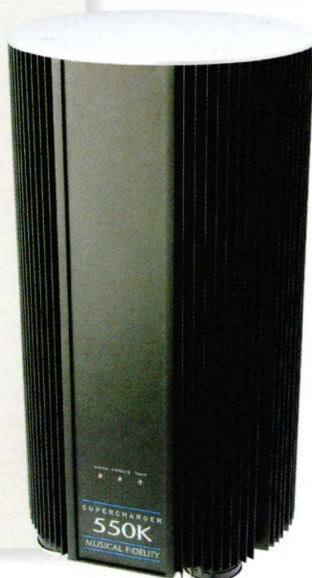
I believe that the 550K Supercharger concept has never been done in hi-fi before. I only expect other brands to launch similar products if we're successful!

You launched the ultra-high sensitivity Kelly speakers ten years ago with the similar objective of increasing dynamic range. Which approach do you consider the more effective?

Over the last ten years I've been on a voyage of discovery. When we designed the Kelly loudspeaker it had a sensitivity of 96dB. At the time I thought that a 50-watt amplifier should be ample to drive it. If you extrapolate from our slide rule you'll see that, by any conventional measure, a 50-watt amplifier with a 96dB sensitivity loudspeaker should be plenty. Yet, when I connected our 200-watts monoblock X-A200 to the speaker, the sound was transformed. At the time I was gobsmacked because I couldn't think of any logical explanation as to why this might be. The X-A50 and X-A200 circuits were exactly the same, except with different power ratings. As the years have gone by I have come to a greater understanding of the real issues involved which has resulted in the 550K and the diagnostic slide rule.

Your kW amplifiers are designed to be located with the rest of the hi-fi hardware, but the 550K's are intended to be sited close to the loudspeakers. Which approach do you favour?

The shorter the loudspeaker cables, the better a system will work. The 550K Supercharger comes with its own short length of loudspeaker cable which ensures ideal coupling to the loudspeaker.



Detail

Cylindrical casework acts as a heatsink

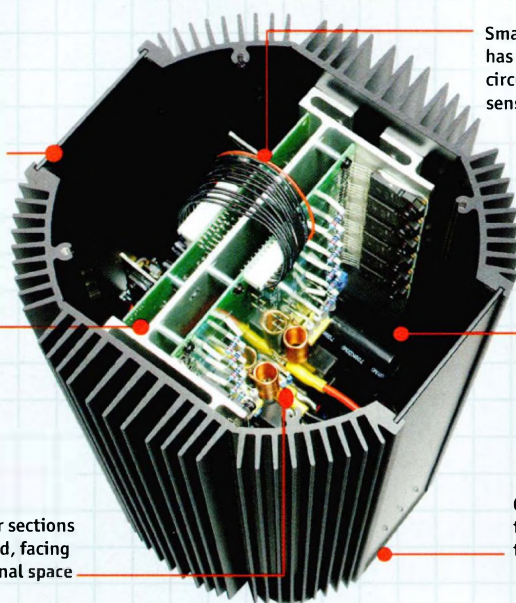
Alloy bridge acts as mounting platform for two PCBs

Power amplifier sections are on one board, facing the larger internal space

Smaller internal space has board with input circuitry, auto-on signal sensing etc

Power supply capacitors

640VA toroidal transformer in the base



the sound, and this was impressively preserved, albeit in a mildly modified form with the 550K Supercharger. This option of combining the attractive qualities of a favourite low-powered amp with the massive extra power and headroom of the 550K is an attractive proposition, and an obvious role for the unit.

If the Naim experience had suggested it was sometimes better to avoid linking power amps in series, and simply use the Supercharger as a power amp, Musical Fidelity's own X-T100 amplifier, perhaps predictably, gave the same result. This 50-watt, two-box integrated amplifier is perhaps an ideal subject for supercharging, and so it proved. It's a pleasant enough amp in its own right, but adding the Supercharger via the speaker cable brought a substantial improvement, not only in terms of dynamic range and loudness, but also in perceived bandwidth and resolution at both ends of the audio range. The net result was a sound quality that was not just better, but substantially bigger in scale too.

However, the sound quality obtained when feeding the 550K from the X-T100's pre-out sockets was rather less satisfactory, adding a degree of treble hardness that proved a disincentive to playing the system at loud volume.

Summing up is difficult. While the 550K is clearly a high-quality monoblock power amplifier that offers massive power output at a relatively modest price, the results

of inserting it into a system Supercharger-style were not entirely predictable. The findings with Musical Fidelity's own X-T100 amplifier certainly validate the concept, but generalisation is risky: each case should be treated on its own particular merits. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 83%



PRO

This ultra-powerful amp offers good sound, and superior dynamic range and headroom across a range of material. It also comes with versatile line- or speaker-level inputs.

CON

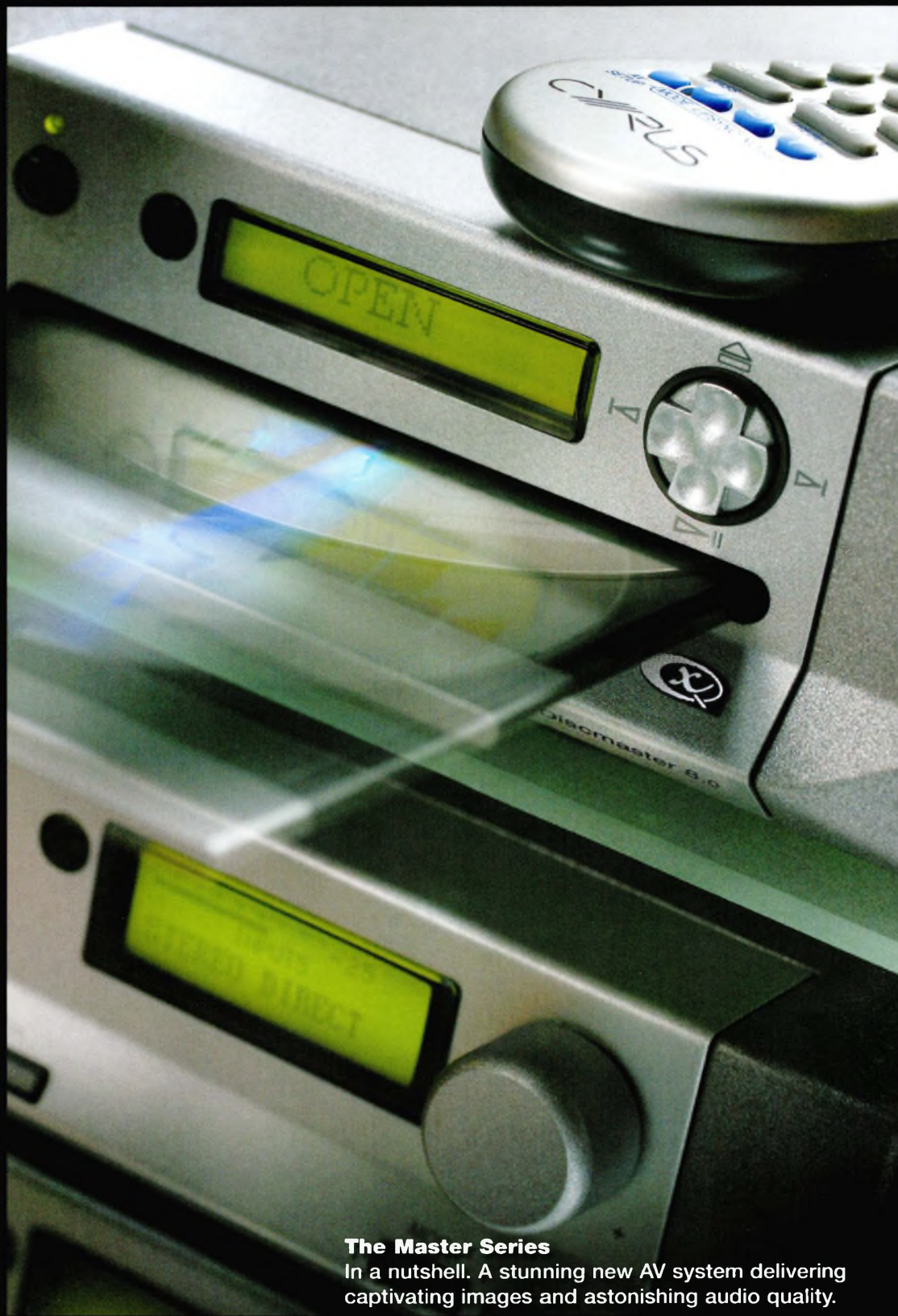
Supercharger concept works well with valve amps, but sounds best when used just as power amp, fed from pre-amp. Could be crisper and tauter.

CONCLUSION

This exceptionally powerful and unusually versatile power amp delivers good sound, ultra-wide dynamic range and offers lots of headroom for peaks. The Supercharger concept is particularly well suited for use with high-quality, low-power (valve) amps.

HI-FI CHOICE >>> **83%**
OVERALL SCORE

Designed and built in Britain



The Master Series

In a nutshell. A stunning new AV system delivering captivating images and astonishing audio quality.

→ the essence of musical luxury, defined by Cyrus

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYERS
CYRUS CD6s

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
CD PLAYER
BEST CD PLAYER £1000-£1500
CYRUS CDBx

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2006
STEREO AMPLIFIERS
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £750 - £1250
CYRUS 8vs2

CYRUS

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For latest news on products or to download a brochure, please visit www.cyrusaudio.com

Active revolution

AVI's new powered standmount sparks a coup in computer audio

PRODUCT AVI ADM9

TYPE Active standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20x30x26cm

• Weight: 9kg • 25mm soft dome tweeter with built-in

100 watt amp • 165mm composite paper cone woofer

with built-in 250 watt amp • USB digital and stereo

analogue phono inputs • Analogue outputs to

subwoofer and slave

CONTACT ☎ 01453 834422 # www.avihifi.com

AVI is moving inexorably away from being simply one of the better names in hi-fi.

Although AVI still produces its standard – and very well received – range of electronics and loudspeakers, it seems that the company is now intent on leading the charge in bringing computer music into our little fold and, in the process, raising the standards for computer audio in general. The forward observer for this conquest of digital downloads was the little Active Neutron loudspeaker (tested in *HFC* 288), however this merely surveyed the battleground

for digital's true champion, the ADM9.

On quick inspection, the ADM9 looks and feels like little more than a good, solid stereo standmount speaker, albeit one with active amps built in. The front-ported two-way with its 25mm soft dome tweeter and the 165mm paper cone bass unit looks surprisingly traditional and works best on 60cm stands when positioned about half a metre away from the side and rear walls. That said, the ADM9 remains firmly in the 'not fussy' camp when it comes to placement. You could happily plonk them on a bookshelf and still get most of the performance you will get from obsessive 'quarter of a millimetre to the left, please' type installations.

A closer look at the ADM9 reveals some differences from ordinary standmounts, though. The first difference is found in the amplifiers behind those two drive units; two bipolar designs, the first being a 100 watt model for the tweeter, with a 250 watt unit for the bass driver and an active fourth-order crossover sitting in front of them.

Look closely at the back of the right-hand

speaker and you'll see the rear panel has five solid gold-plated phono sockets (with just one in the left speaker). One of these connects the left and right speakers together, and a five-metre length of phono-to-phono cable is supplied for this purpose. Two of the connectors act as inputs for an analogue line source, while the other two are outputs for a slaved speaker and a subwoofer (a matching subwoofer with a front-firing 250mm bass unit is also available). The speaker also includes a rudimentary one-source preamplifier, which can be controlled by using One For All's Audio Zapper remote control that comes supplied with the ADM9. The controls on the Zapper are limited to volume up and down, mute and source selection, however these are standard Philips RC5 commands if you want to invest in a more fancy remote.

A one-source analogue input active speaker is not going to drive the digital download revolution on its own, but that all changes with the strange square socket marked 'digital input'. This is a USB 1.1 socket and behind it sits a Burr-Brown digital converter. And it's here that AVI has been doubly canny. The

USB port allows you to access anything that is digitally recorded and stored on a PC or Macintosh, be it a quick download of the new Killers song whipped off iTunes, a carefully worked Exact Audio Copy-enhanced, AccurateRip-validated bit-for-bit recording of your CDs stored on your computer, or even a FLAC-encoded Studio Master from Linn.

The 'doubly canny' bit comes in when you connect an analogue source to the ADM9, as it allows the USB port to pass those analogue signals back through to the computer, for ripping and storage. In other words, if you have a good record deck and phono stage, the USB-equipped ADM9 will turn those two into an analogue remastering centre. A Toslink-only version of the ADM9 (sporting a Wolfson DAC) is also available for those still married to 'tradition' and CD inputs, but you lose the record facility in the process.





“The ADM9 shows just how good downloaded and ripped music can be. A good MP3 file can sound powerful, incisive... even dynamic.”

SOUND QUALITY

When we tested the little Active Neutrons, we considered them to be the crossing point between desktop audio and hi-fi proper. In the ADM9, that crossover has already happened. These are not desktop speakers, unless it happens to be a studio mixing-desk. The ADM9 is an unashamed front-of-house living room loudspeaker, that hooks up to that computer in the living room that you never talk about, but secretly know that you use more than you care to admit. As such, it's somewhat difficult to describe the performance of the ADM9 without describing what it does for computer audio.

That's because it's a revelation, nothing less. We seem to be unable to think of computer-derived music without thinking of the horrors of tinny laptop speakers, teenagers playing R'n'B through their mobiles on the bus, and Pod phones destroying music on train journeys. However, this is judging the performance from the worst end of the spectrum. Right now, the ADM9 represents the other end, and shows just how good downloaded and ripped music can be. Far from the usual tinny burble, a good MP3 file (or similar) can sound powerful, incisive... even dynamic when treated with respect.

When you move over to an audiophile source component, it is possible to hear the difference between a 128mbps MP3 file and the CD original... if you compare the two side-by-side under critical conditions. But through the AVI ADM9, the differences are far less pronounced than you might expect. This is not because the

speaker drags the CD source down to the lowest common denominator; it's because the speaker brings downloaded music up to its highest common factor. Ultimately the ADM9 treats music as music, without judging it by its file extension.

The ADM9 sound, from any source, is pin-sharp accurate. There's a sense of musical precision that puts the ADM9 in the lofty company of the better class of studio-monitor. Sounds appear bolted down, rooted in their three-dimensional space between the loudspeakers, with instruments appearing to have a proper sense of scale and tonality. Instruments and human voices have an innate sense of rightness about them too, with a treble that extends naturally and a midrange that approaches LS3/5a levels of clarity. There's also a sense of absolute authority, which comes from having active control of the drive units. This makes the speaker sound dynamically and tonally unflappable, especially in the bass. This is a powerful and tightly controlled box, and only in a bigger room will you feel the need to reach for the matching subwoofer.

We found the active amps to be more mains fussy than their integrated amplifier counterparts at the price; the sound was always good, but it got distinctly better – and the improvement more marked than most – after midnight. Whether this is really a downside, or an indicator of just how honest these speakers are remains to be seen. One thing is clear, though – if you are after a lush, romantic interpretation of music, look elsewhere. These

speakers give you the musical facts, unalloyed and unsoftened.

Even without the digital call to arms, this little active speaker would be a real star. It delivers a sound far bigger and more powerful than you would expect, with the sort of musical accuracy and honesty that you don't get at a grand and you might struggle to find even at £5,000. Factor in that DAC and what it does for computer audio, and the result is a product that's one of the most obvious Best Buys we've encountered in years. The Revolution begins here... **HFC**

Alan Sircom



VERDICT

SOUND >>> 90%



FEATURES >>> 92%



BUILD >>> 90%



VALUE >>> 91%



PRO

Deceptively powerful loudspeaker that combines stunning accuracy with total command of both the hi-fi and computer audio media. Excellent value, too.

CON

Mild mains sensitivity of the active amps. Those seeking rose-tinted musical moments need not apply either, as the AVI's are far too honest.

CONCLUSION

Generation iPod need have nothing to fear. Downloads can sound extremely good if dealt with appropriately. Better still, even the most iTunes-phobic audiophile will be surprised at how good their CDs can sound through these active powerhouses.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 91%

How the new 550K Supercharger from Musical Fidelity turns most hi-fi systems into 550w dynamic power houses.

The new 550K Supercharger is a low gain power amp that is connected to the system just before the loudspeakers.

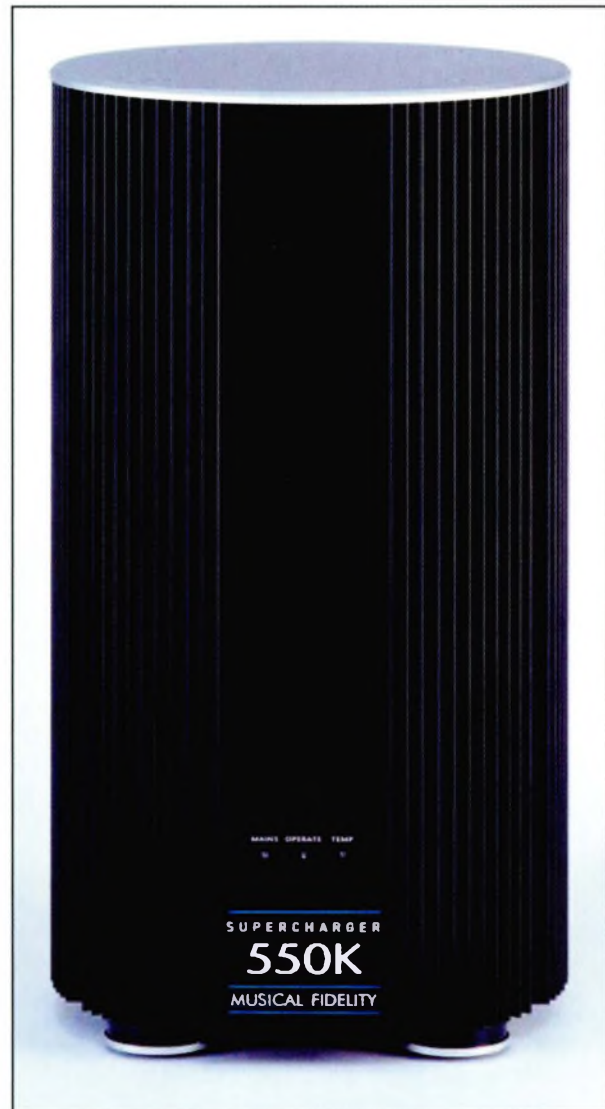
Used in a system with an amp rated between 50 and 200 watts, it will increase its power to 550 watts, and improve the system almost beyond recognition.

It dramatically increases dynamic range and enables the amplifier already in the system to function perfectly.

The 550K turns even a modest integrated amp into a state-of-the-art amplification system.

It works with any make of amp, and it works with valve amps, transistor amps and hybrids.

Visit musicalfidelity.com to find out more about the 550K Supercharger, or contact your audio dealer for an audition.



MUSICAL FIDELITY

Hearing is believing.



Bass extension

This sub-£500 sub from MartinLogan delivers a sound that belies its diminutive dimensions

PRODUCT MartinLogan Dynamo

TYPE Active subwoofer

PRICE £449

CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909

🌐 www.uk.martinlogan.com

This is the most affordable model in the growing MartinLogan subwoofer line-up, and it's a mostly straightforward and compact design. While hardly the cheapest of its type, it boasts an unusually solid and heavy construction, being sealed rather than reflex-loaded, which eliminates various problems to do with vented operation. The enclosure is tight and reasonably non-resonant too, save for the panel covering the user controls, sockets and digital amplifier. There are also some design subtleties that make the sub especially suitable for mixed stereo/multichannel operation.

Straight from the box, the Dynamo has a downwards-firing drive unit, and is supported by a slim, optionally spiked framework. This can be repositioned so the driver is forward-firing – mainly intended for when the sub is housed inside a cabinet. Four well-made spikes are supplied, and the digital amplifier is a clean-sounding 200-watt BASH unit.

The Dynamo is designed to be home cinema and stereo-friendly. There's a choice of straight

line-level inputs using twin phonos and speaker-level 4mm binding-post inputs, both of which feed a low-pass adjustable filter, and a level control specifically for stereo applications. There's also a separate (wideband) LFE input to accommodate the output of an AV amp or processor. This has its own internal low-pass filtering applied at source, bypassing the sub's internal bass management. Each of the two independent inputs can be adjusted individually, the former using the system amplifier controls. Phase switching (0, 90 and 180 degrees) is included, plus an auto-power standby switch.

SOUND QUALITY

It may not be large, but this is a sophisticated design, with very specific voicing. Following the 50-hour break-in period, bass depth and weight are much better than you might expect. The internal low-pass filter is very effective, with a rapid roll-off. At the same time there's a softness to the Dynamo's delivery, but it remains crisp and tuneful enough, and the sound is clean and agile, with a hint of sweetness.

There are a few niggles. MartinLogan's claim that corner positioning usually works best is very dubious. Yes, if you want the biggest bang for your buck for home cinema, it's the way to go – but the results tend to be rather uneven. Overall, the Dynamo works best with small AV

systems, and in particular when adding bottom-end presence to quality stereo systems.

There's a lot of flexibility built into the model, but not all of it is very useful. The forward-facing configuration is aurally less successful than the downwards-firing default – and placing a sub in a cabinet generally means transparency takes a hit. On the plus side, though, the interface section will accommodate a second similar sub, which usually gives a more even spread of sound. All in all, the Dynamo impresses. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%



FEATURES >> 86%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 87%



PRO

Superior construction quality, compact packaging and unusual flexibility. A refined performance with a good perception of bass depth and speed. Good for stereo and multichannel systems alike.

CON

The 13-watt 'standby' power rating is unimpressive. Forward-firing option should be avoided for best results.

CONCLUSION

Compact, powerful and well controlled, this is a classy and well-designed subwoofer that delivers a solid performance in mixed-purpose systems (hi-fi/AV), though arguably it's at its most impressive with compact, quality stereo systems.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> 86%

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



marantz

CD PLAYER COMBO



marantz

STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Perfect harmony?

This budget amp/CD player combo looks like a match made in heaven, but does it sound like one?

PRODUCT Marantz CD6002 and PM6002
TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE (CD6002) £280; (PM6002) £280
KEY FEATURES (CD6002) Size (WxHxD): 44x8.7x28.3cm • Weight: 4.7kg • Electrical and optical digital output • Variable headphone output • Compatible with: CD, CD-R/RW, MP3, WMA
(PM6002) Size (WxHxD): 44x11.6x34.3cm • Weight: 7.1kg • Phono input • 5 line inputs (unbalanced) • Two record outputs • Two pairs speaker terminals (switched) • Output power: 45W per channel (8 ohms)
CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 @ www.marantz.com

Marantz appears to be on something of a roll with its stereo separates at the moment – we've seen some real crackers in recent months, including the superb PM7001 integrated amplifier. We're therefore more than happy to witness the introduction of a matching budget amp/CD player pair at a very tempting price. While the budget separates market isn't quite as lively

now as it was a decade or so ago, a quick trawl through the usual online budget hi-fi retailers soon confirms that these Marantz units face plenty of competition. Cambridge Audio's Azur 540 and 640 models, for example, aren't far off, while NAD, Denon and others also offer similarly priced products.

If one goes purely by external appearances, these two units are undoubtedly bargains. The front panels are surprisingly generous chunks of brushed aluminium, while the all-important connectors around the back are gold-plated with copper-plated screws. The feel of all the controls is reassuringly firm, and we trust the photos will convince you that the look here is thoroughly smart and contemporary. Our only real aesthetic quibble is that the illuminations on the amp are so subtle that sometimes one might be fooled into thinking it isn't turned on. With the CD player there's no such ambiguity, though, and its dot-matrix display also shows CD Text if there's any on the disc.

CD isn't the only 'old-school' disc format out there, and the PM6002 also caters for LPs. You can only use moving-magnet phono cartridges, but that's not the end of the world. And if that sounds slightly retro, then get this: the order of input sockets on the back panel is LP, tuner, CD... Yes, the tuner is effectively put before CD – just like the good old days! Well, it made us smile anyway. Including the two recorder circuits there are five line inputs, and no, there isn't an iPod dock or a mini-jack socket for portable audio. Marantz has opted for electronic input switching, but the component used for this is a high-voltage one, unfazed by sources with particularly high-level output. The volume control is a conventional motorised mechanical device of above-average quality.

Actually, quite a lot inside the case of each unit counts as above average. The generous toroidal power transformer in the amp, for instance, which feeds above-average reservoir capacitors through an admittedly bog-standard

(but capacitively quenched) bridge rectifier. The main amplifier section uses discrete transistors, with a single pair per channel of power devices mounted on an internal heat sink. The CD player, meanwhile, uses the latest and greatest DAC/digital filter chip from Crystal Semiconductor – the same one that’s used in various upmarket models from Marantz and others. The analogue part uses Marantz’s well-established ‘HDAM’ modules instead of integrated-circuit op-amps.

Yes, there are signs here and there of cost-cutting. The amplifier’s output terminals are nothing special, for instance, and the casework is thin and undamped. But for under £300 a piece, what do you want, for goodness sake? Physically at least, this is value writ large. Let’s see if that’s true sonically, too.

SOUND QUALITY

We’ve come to expect pretty high standards even from components this cheap, and our initial reaction on connecting this duo together was one of very slight disappointment. The sound was lively, detailed and generally neutral in terms of tone, but it seemed just a little

“The PM6002 only started to sing when we really caned it, driving it close to clip. Under these circumstances the sound opens up.”

lightweight: not so much short on bass level as slightly lacking drive. This was with a well-loved and utterly familiar pair of ATC SCM20 loudspeakers, which despite low sensitivity are still fairly straightforward to drive – just not necessarily very loud. Thinking perhaps that the problem was one of amp/speaker synergy, we tried a couple of other models, but the feeling persisted.

Then we turned the volume up. We’d started at quite moderate replay levels, calling for something around a quarter of the PM6002’s maximum output, but it only started to sing when we really caned it, driving it close to clip. Under these circumstances the sound really opens up, especially in the lower registers. We’ve come across behaviour like this before in budget amps, though this seems a particularly pronounced example. Much has been said about the necessity of leaving some headroom in setting volume level, but in most situations this is a bit of a red herring, and most solid-state amplifiers work perfectly happily right up to clip level, and then just overload abruptly.

It does seem to be a significant limitation, though, having an amp whose performance is optimal only when it’s at full output. For a start, it makes for a sound that varies considerably with musical style.



Highly dynamic classical music isn’t really the PM6002’s ideal match, for while the climaxes can be most impressive, the longer periods spent in the dynamic lowlands seem a little prosaic, lacking bass resonance in instruments such as double bass, piano and low percussion. Rock ‘n’ roll is great as long as your idea of suitably head-banging happens to coincide with what 60W (our practical finding) will do

to your loudspeakers. Quite a lot of recent pop is rather good too, but then plenty of that is mastered so hard in the direction of maximum drive that a little throttling back by the replay equipment can seem a blessed relief.

All these observations refer to the units working as a pair, and you’re entitled to wonder if we’re blaming the amp for problems that may exist with the CD player. Testing the two apart, however, strongly suggests that the CD6002 is subject to no such dynamic variations. It is, in fact, rather outrageously good in almost every way – so much so that we were happy to include it in this month’s *Ultimate Group Test* (p62), where you can read more about its charms and discover how it fared head-to-head with competition at twice its price.

For a true assessment, though, we tried the PM6002 with a number of beyond-reproach sources, including a dCS DAC, and on the whole, consistent results came up. Its treble is typical of a good budget amp: clear, reasonably well extended and sufficiently open and airy to allow a nicely realistic decay to sounds and recreation of acoustic space. The midrange is without obvious coloration, and across the band there’s no trace of noise, or indeed intrusive coarseness. It’s really just the bass that seems constrained at any modest volume

setting. Play music with long-held bass notes (organ music being an obvious example) and it’s clear that the low frequencies are there, but bass transients somehow are reluctant to bloom and then decay as one expects.

We wouldn’t normally bother with this, but as the option was there, we enabled the tone controls and wound the bass knob round a little, not much beyond ‘one o’clock’. Call it a cheat if you like, but we found this remarkably successful in restoring some life to the lowest registers, and it didn’t significantly over-blow the sound at high levels either. Incidentally, the phono input – which is good as these things go, detailed and with good imaging – seems to like just a little more bass enhancement.

This is in many ways an attractive duo. The CD player is highly capable in all areas and the amp has a lot to like despite our reservations. Ideally, we’d spring for a PM7001 every time, but give this one a try by all means. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT – CD6002

SOUND >> 88%	CONCLUSION A great budget CD player. It’s smart, well featured and well built, and sounds admirable in every way, with especially fine imaging and detail resolution.
FEATURES >> 86%	
BUILD >> 83%	
VALUE >> 91%	

HI-FI CHOICE >> 87%

VERDICT – PM6002

SOUND >> 80%	CONCLUSION Detail and midrange/treble tonality are excellent for the price, but unless you turn the volume way up on this amp, the bass is oddly unexciting.
FEATURES >> 82%	
BUILD >> 83%	
VALUE >> 84%	

HI-FI CHOICE >> 82%



S p r e z z a t u r a

Famous for his 'Il Libro Del Cortegiano' (The Book of the Courtier, 1528), Renaissance humanist Baldesar Castiglione coined the word 'sprezzatura' to describe the ideal for courtly behaviour. He insisted that in order to be worthy, exceptional virtuosity should be conveyed with an unaffected, effortless dignity. In essence, sprezzatura is the art of making something difficult look easy.

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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Classic cones

These unashamedly modern-looking speakers from Heco can't disguise their respect for the past

PRODUCT Heco Celan 300

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £570 per pair

CONTACT ☎ 01822 612449 @ www.heco-audio.de

The origins of German hi-fi brand Heco can be traced back to the late 1940s.

These days, however, it's owned by another loudspeaker firm – Magnat – which acquired it in 2001. At present, there are four distinct ranges in the Heco catalogue, the Celan models being the cheapest. Aside from the 300 standmount, the family includes three floorstanders, a centre speaker and two subs.

Magnat product manager Shandro Fischer developed the pulp drivers for the Celan range using Saba and Graetz designs from the 1950s/60s as a model. Hence the kraft-paper main driver cone, made of long-fibre pulp from Nordic trees with ten per cent wool for damping. This cone is supported by a cast aluminium chassis and equipped with a shielded magnet system that helps the speaker achieve a high 90dB sensitivity. The bass/mid driver, meanwhile, has a 120mm cone in a 170mm chassis.

The 300's soft dome tweeter is coated with carbon nano-particles that are said to reduce the problems associated with break-up in such drive units. Unusually, there's an optional

connection to this driver via an extra terminal on the rear panel alongside the usual bi-wire pair. This produces a 2dB increase for rooms with a lot of soft furnishing.

The cabinet is shaped asymmetrically in an attempt to reduce standing waves, and is fitted with a bolted-in aluminium reflex port. Overall, it's finished to a very high standard.

SOUND QUALITY

It's not hard to hear what a valve enthusiast would like about this speaker; it has an open quality thanks to very good retrieval of acoustic space around instruments and voices. It's also highly detailed across the band and does an unusually good job of rendering instrumental timbre. Pairing it with a Pioneer A-A9 (a clean, open amp at the same price point) enables it to produce a crisp – but not overly bright sound – with excellent imaging in terms of both spatial positioning and solidity of sounds.

Timing, while good, is about average for the price. While it's slightly dearer, Ruark's more compact Sabre III does a distinctly better job in this respect. Given the 300's size, bass extension is respectable when used in free space on 60cm Atacama stands, though it'd probably work as well positioned about 30-50cm from a rear wall.

By far the most intriguing thing about the 300 is the option to increase the treble output

by 2dB. We feared this might make the speaker too bright, but in fact it produces a significant increase in vitality and realism. With some discs this is quite captivating; the way you can hear right into a voice results in an edge-of-the-seat experience we've not encountered since there was a London Decca cartridge on our deck. It's a sort of magnification of the system and recording that'll be too revealing for some combinations, but delivers a degree of emotional communication that's addictive. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 90%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 85%



PRO

Delivers a revealing and engaging sound featuring good dynamics and tone colour. The asymmetrical enclosure is nicely finished with good detailing.

CON

The optional +2dB terminal will be a bit of a stretch for some cables to span. Model sacrifices a little refinement for the sake of dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This standmount's high sensitivity and historically influenced cone design have resulted in a highly engaging speaker. The 300 does tone colour, dynamics and detail with considerable aplomb and communicates superbly in its +2dB mode.

HI-FI CHOICE >>> **86%**
OVERALL SCORE

TCl Constrictor Powerblock

TYPE Mains cable and mains block

PRICE £160 (1.5m, 6 way)

CONTACT ☎ 028 9267 3024 # www.true-colours.com

TCi offers a wide range of Constrictor (Super Constrictor, Boa Constrictor etc) mains cables, and the premium for having one terminated with a multiway Powerblock instead of a single IEC connector is not high. Indeed, the Powerblock itself is nothing unusual, it's a good-quality component, but completely standard industrial-grade, switched and unfiltered. That said, there is logic at work here, as a Powerblock with a relatively long cable (different lengths available to suit) will allow the use of shorter individual leads to amp and source components. The Constrictor cable itself is a braided multicore design, four cores handle each of the live and neutral paths, with each core insulated in PTFE. The overall assembly is insulated in nylon braid, making it quite substantial and only moderately flexible.

We found this a successful upgrade with a wide range of equipment, applicable from budget to high-end, but probably most at home with mid-range equipment where a

worthwhile degree of grain was removed from the sound. Oddly, though, more sophisticated-sounding kit didn't show this up so noticeably – when the basic sound is cleaner there's evidently less to improve in this way. We also noted a minor tonal effect whereby bass became a little tighter and just a touch more extended, and while it's clearly unlikely that a mains cable could ever affect actual response, it's not unreasonable to suppose that this is a function of the improved clarity, just allowing the subtle details of the bass to register more clearly on the ear. Stereo images likewise seemed slightly more precise. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

This practical product mostly benefits clarity and precision. Compatible with the various leads we appended to it.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 84%

Atlas Ichor

TYPE Mains cable

PRICE £125 (1m)

CONTACT ☎ 0800 731 1140 # www.hifi.org.uk

This is Atlas' only mains cable and it is available with various connectors and in various lengths. Looking much like any free giveaway cable it nevertheless includes unusually thick conductors of finely stranded copper, which are insulated in PTFE and screened. Audio interconnects are screened to keep noise out, and in the context of low signal levels and relatively high impedances this is frequently of great benefit. With mains cables, however, it's much less obvious that this is necessary. In fact, there's an equally strong argument for keeping noise inside the cable, so as to prevent the noise that inevitably exists on mains circuits from radiating in the vicinity of sensitive audio equipment. With the Ichor, Atlas has contrived a screening system that adds little bulk to the cable, leading to a perfectly manageable and flexible 9mm overall size.

The benefits of using this cable are at once subtle and yet surprisingly profound. They're the kind of sound quality differences that don't



leap out at you instantly, but gradually make you realise that there is an extra level of musical involvement over what was there before. That's assuming you are using decent replay equipment, of course. We'd hesitate to recommend this cable for budget systems as its effects were barely discernible there, but with at least decent, and especially high-end kit, the advantage seemed pretty clear. In analytical

terms, we're talking about fine detail, but the musical impact is what really registers. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

This relatively cheap cable offers improvement in musicality across a range of amps and sources.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> 86%

Black Rhodium Polar Knight DCT

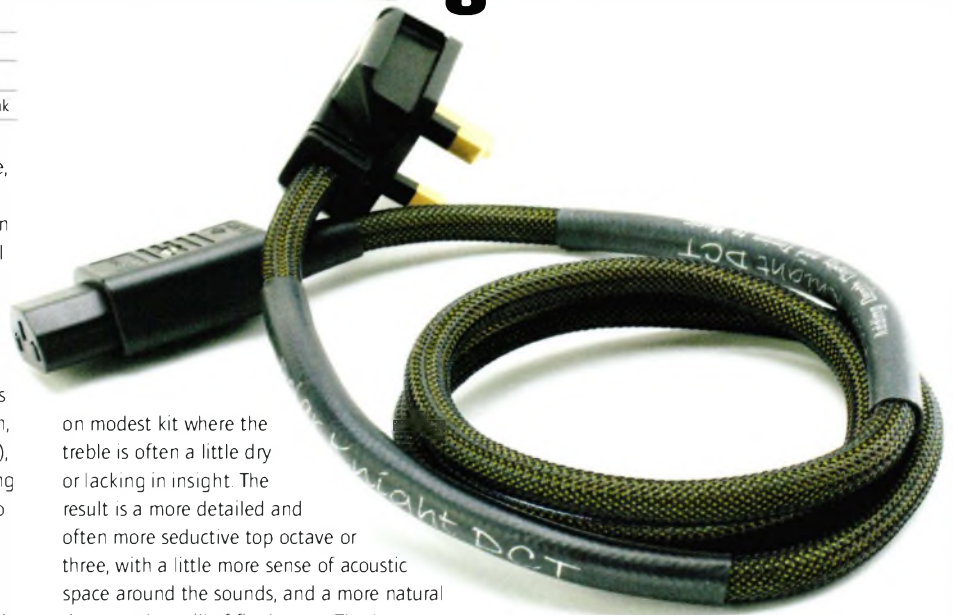
TYPE Mains cable

PRICE £175 (1.25m)

CONTACT ☎ 01332 342233 🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk

A new addition to Black Rhodium's range, Polar Knight DCT relies on upgraded materials rather than novel construction for its claimed improvements. That said, it still resembles a standard kettle lead in both geometry and basic specification. However, whereas regular cables use PVC insulation, this one uses Black Rhodium's favourite silicone rubber, while the stranded conductors are plated in what looks like silver. In addition, the cable is Deep Cryogenically Treated (DCT), a well-established process that involves cooling conductors by a couple of hundred degrees to improve the molecular structure. While the mechanical changes wrought by DCT are accepted, their relevance to audio are still subject to some controversy. With this in mind we were interested to try this implementation.

Of all the cables tested here, this seemed to be the one most suited to budget systems. That's not to say that it made no improvement to high-end equipment, but its particular knack of clearing up the treble is particularly effective



on modest kit where the treble is often a little dry or lacking in insight. The result is a more detailed and often more seductive top octave or three, with a little more sense of acoustic space around the sounds, and a more natural decay to the 'tail' of final notes. That's not to say that this cable will remedy poor-quality amplification or source components, but it does seem to tweak a little more treble precision out of systems than others we tried. Bass is just a touch clearer too, but less obviously so. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Notably improves the high treble of lower-priced systems. High-end kit is also improved, but less obviously so.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **86%**

Russ Andrews Signature PowerKord

TYPE Mains cable

PRICE £275 (1m)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

As befits the dearest cable here (though not by a long way the dearest in the Russ Andrews catalogue), the Signature PowerKord features some unusually sexy-looking connectors. There's no doubt that the transparent housing of the plug is done for effect, but the rest of its design is much more prosaic, and aimed at solving the otherwise intractable problem of ultra-thick conductors. At the other end, an upmarket WattGate IEC socket does similar business, terminating the 12 live and 12 neutral, individually insulated, Kimber Varistrand conductors. Naturally, all of the materials are of a high quality, including the 'Hyper Pure' copper and PTFE insulation. In classic Kimber style (the cable is made by Kimber especially for Russ Andrews) the conductors are even woven together in type of Litz style, thereby reducing inductance and improving interference rejection.

Few people with a budget system would run to a cable of this calibre, and so it's probably not much of an issue that its performance with

cheaper systems is much of a muchness with the far cheaper Atlas. Where Signature works its magic is with lovingly assembled upmarket systems – think £20,000 or more system price – in which context its contribution to musical expression is admirable and indeed good value. It improved some amps we tried but was most effective with source components and phono preamps, where it did that famous 'removing veils' thing in a manner one could reasonably expect of upgrading a CD player by a model or two. Not so subtle, in other words. Musicians seem less remote, instruments less processed. High-end in every sense. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Matched to a high-end system, this is capable of dramatically improving focus, detail and musical connection.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **88%**

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

CD PLAYERS

Forget the 'budget' tag, because £250-£600 buys a lot of CD player these days

ON TEST



Advance Acoustic MCD-20311
£400



Arcam DiVA CD73
£450



Cambridge Audio Azur 740C
£500



Marantz CD6002
£280



Pioneer PD-D6
£350



Saxon CD300
£600

The concept of a 'budget' CD player is entirely relative. You can get something that'll play CDs for well under £100, but whether such a device qualifies as hi-fi is a moot point. Around the £100 mark, it seems the market has dried up a bit: there's the odd model to be found, but nothing like the variety there used to be. This doubtless has a lot to do with DVD models, which have replaced a lot of cheap CD spinners for people who don't listen to many CDs. However, it's generally reckoned by those who care about quality that the budget sector encompasses models at around the £500 mark and under.

Assuming that someone who can afford to spend £500 may well manage to find an extra ton if it buys them significantly improved performance, we've stretched the upper limit for our group to £600, setting our lower limit at just under half that. It's interesting just to cast an eye over the players before testing begins: it's by no means obvious how prices will vary judging by the external appearance of each model. They all look well made and finished (they are!), and there's nothing visibly 'cheap' about any of them.

That makes a change from what used to be available at this price level. It just so happens we had to hand a 20-year-old player from the same brand as the cheapest model here, originally costing the same, and it has a lot more plastic in it and fewer features. Bear in mind that in 20 years the price of housing has quadrupled, the price of petrol nearly tripled and the price of many basic foods nearly doubled. Oh, and full-price CDs have gone up by about 20 per cent.

It's well known that the manufacture of electronic devices has fallen in price significantly thanks to a combination of vast sales volumes and low-cost assembly in China, but it's particularly sobering to note that the key components in these CD players aren't cheap makeweights, but rather high-performance parts used in real high-end equipment. For instance, the Marantz uses a DAC chip that's the latest and highest-spec part from Crystal Semiconductor, one of the most respected names in DAC production.

The point we're making is that there's no need to feel you're slumming it by looking at these CD players. The high end may offer some gorgeous kit, but the law of diminishing returns is working strongly in favour of these six little beauties. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Exposure 3010 integrated stereo amplifier
- ⊕ EAR 802 preamp/519 monoblocks
- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Kimber, Wireworld and custom cables

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ⊕ Ian Dury *The Bus Driver's Prayer and Other Stories*
- ⊕ Guzmán *Ambrosio*
- ⊕ Dick Hyman *Plays Fats Waller*
- ⊕ Alkan *Organ Works*

EARS USED

As ever, we wouldn't be able to do all this without the keen ears and minds of our listening panellists:

- ⊕ John Bamford (Meridian)
- ⊕ Abbas Hussain (Wireworld)
- ⊕ Darman Azman (Audio Partnership)





LISTENING TESTS

Each of the players in the group was subjected to rigorous listening tests. These were conducted under blind, level-matched (to 0.05dB) conditions with the involvement of some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. In addition, extended sighted listening tests were conducted by this writer, using a wider variety of equipment and music and at various volume levels, in an attempt to determine real-world performance.

LAB TESTS

Our laboratory tests were no less rigorous, with custom-made CD-Rs among the discs played, and measurements taken using a combination of 'traditional' lab instruments and a high-quality ADC, which converted the analogue output of each player back to digital for analysis in Cool Edit Pro and Mathcad on a PC. Our methodology provides a searching analysis of a multitude of aspects, the most important of which are summarised in the bar graphs (with other significant findings mentioned in the text). Not all measurements are reported for all players – for example, absolute speed accuracy was fine for all of them.

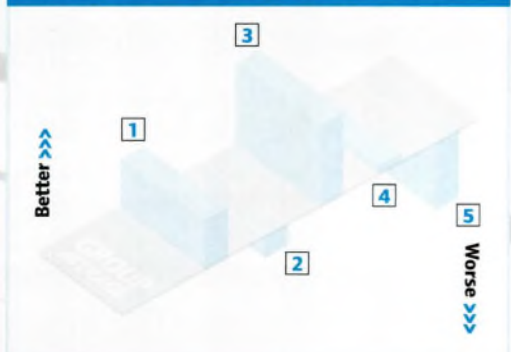
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five key technical parameters. A percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five parameters are:

- 1] Total harmonic distortion:** The classic distortion criterion, measured as the purity of a single sine wave at various frequencies and levels.
- 2] Jitter:** A measure of how stable the timing clock is. Measured at the analogue output, this distortion shows up as increased noise and/or low-level interfering frequencies, which can contribute to sonic 'grunge'.
- 3] Linearity:** How accurately the output behaves at very low volume levels. Poor figures can lead to distortion rising considerably in quiet musical passages.
- 4] Dynamic range:** This is effectively the same as signal-to-noise ratio, the difference between full output and the practical noise floor of each player.
- 5] Digital filtering:** Frequencies above half the sampling frequency should be efficiently filtered off. The filter is tested by playing tones at various frequencies and looking for ultrasonic spurious signals that accompany them.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ADV. ACOUSTIC MCD-203II

This French model has the looks, but does it take our fancy?

Based in Toulouse, Advance Acoustic is yet another brand taking advantage of Chinese manufacturing to offer products with apparently astounding specifications for the price. If it were built in Europe to this standard, the MCD-203II would certainly cost well over £1,000, featuring as it does a sturdy metal chassis, a quarter-inch-thick aluminium front panel, valve-driven balanced output, substantial internal screening and a complex power supply based on a toroidal transformer.

Indeed, if looking suitably high-end is your most important criterion, this player walks away with the honours before we've even begun the test. Seriously, though, even in China, is it possible to put this much CD player together without economising horribly somewhere? Well, there are some cheap bits (the XLR connectors, for instance, are plastic-bodied, and the valves are unbranded), but most of the rest looks fine. The transport is nothing surprising, but behind it is a circuit board with a recent Analog Devices DAC chip, and while the op-amps and passive components are nothing special, they're not by any means the cheapest that can be found. Even the remote control has a solid metal body.

We found this quite a pleasant player to use on the whole, though it has a couple of slightly irritating features. For one, the CD tray conceals the 'Open/Close' button when open, and the model will also go into standby automatically if it isn't used for a while. For reasons obviously related to the valves, coming back into full operation takes a whole minute, so breaks can last a bit longer than expected. We found the display a little brash and hard to read too.

SOUND QUALITY

Sadly, this player's high-end pretensions aren't fully backed up by its sonic performance, which our listening panel found a little lacklustre and lacking in involvement. It did attract praise for its 'big and bold' overall picture, but at the same time, that was felt to be a bit too vague, lacking subtleties and specifics. Bass is quite



well extended, but not all that tuneful, lacking real snap and a degree of polish that was heard from some of the other players in the group.

Of all the music excerpts, the solo piano track generated the most detailed criticism of this player. Although the decay of isolated notes was praised, where there are several notes together (in chords or in quick succession), the Advance fails to separate them and presents a rather jumbled version of events. Also, the attack is lacking in crisp leading edges, and the overall result is bland and a little colourless.

Rock and pop fared better, with good sound effects in the Michael Jackson track and a reasonable degree of drive and attack. Even here, though, the sound could use more bite, particularly on vocals and lead guitar, and once again the whole sonic image is a bit generalised. Talking of 'image', this is quite good laterally, though not ultra-precise, and it lacks anything much in the way of depth.

Heard over a longer period, the player still failed to make a lasting impression. It's never less than pleasant, but seldom more than that. No tonal area seems vastly under- or overdone, dynamics are decent and there's a fair degree of detail, but you'll have to look elsewhere for deep analysis or real musical involvement. Even at such a tempting price, we can't go overboard or wax lyrical about this one. **HFC**

VERDICT

<p>SOUND >>> 80% </p> <p>FEATURES >>> 82% </p> <p>BUILD >>> 86% </p> <p>VALUE >>> 82% </p>	<p>Advance Acoustic's player offers astonishingly upmarket build quality for the price, but sadly this isn't entirely matched by the sound, which is a little indistinct and not as involving as one might wish for.</p>
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 80%</p>	



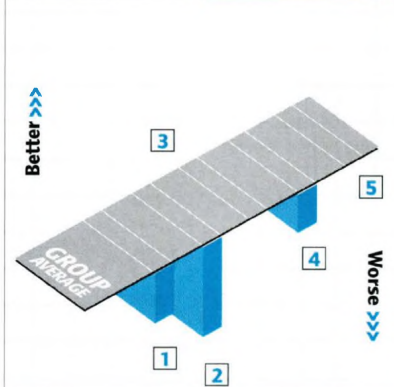
LAB REPORT

Most of the MCD-203II's measured performance is par for the course, with distortion below 0.01% under pretty much all conditions (strangely, it's rather higher via the balanced output), noise fine, albeit not truly state-of-the-art, and frequency response flat in-band and slightly too gently rolled off around 22kHz.

What does cause us some concern, however, is the measurement for jitter, which at something like 3ns (depending on the weighting one applies) is among the worst we've seen in many years. It has a strong component at 3Hz which sounds as though it's related to the rate at which the transport apparently re-reads data off the disc – it being a high-speed transport.

The audibility of this jitter is subject to some debate, but that figure is clearly way too high and probably accounts for the player's lack of success in our listening tests.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >>> -30%
- 2] Jitter >>> -70%
- 3] Linearity >>> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >>> -20%
- 5] Digital filter >>> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	1.8V	2.28V
Total harmonic distortion	0.1%	0.004%
Signal-to-noise ratio	-	103dB

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About Advance Acoustic

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ARCAM DIVA CD73

A budget player that sounds better than some high-end models

Arcam's CD players all look very similar. In fact, externally, this is identical to the CD192. It's considerably simpler inside, though, lacking the latter's upsampling function and highly specified DAC board. Arcam has fitted the CD73 with a Wolfson DAC, which like nearly all such chips oversamples anyway, so the differences may not appear that vast, but other components are also considerably more modest, such as the op-amps performing filtering and output-buffering functions.

Disc replay starts with a familiar-looking audio CD transport, which is connected to the player's single main circuit board, and upon which all the major sections reside. The mains transformer is a medium-size toroidal affair, and a selection of familiar regulator chips are used to smooth its rectified output. Passive components are good-quality, with particularly well-regarded plastic film capacitors in the audio path, while the op-amps are mid-range types. Among a few fillips to the basic spec are twin output sockets and CD Text display. We've long admired Arcam's CD player display, which is particularly clear and readable. We also like how separate front-panel buttons handle the track skip and search functions.

The casework is nothing fancy, with a steel tray enclosed by a thin aluminium lid, though a gently curved metal front panel adds a touch of class with its neatly flush-fitting CD drawer. And, in fact, we'd count the thin lid as a plus, because it has very little tendency to resonate mechanically. Quite apart from the contentious suggestion of electrical microphony, mechanical resonance in casework can be a significant contributor to the 'sound' of audio electronics.

SOUND QUALITY

Lots of positive comments greeted this player. It evidently has the knack of presenting musical information pleasingly and in detail, without any effort on the listener's part. How else to explain such a variety of praise, for bass, treble, dynamic ebb and flow, singers' diction and



more? As one listener pointed out, this is a highly detailed player which makes it very easy to hear deep into the layers of any recording. Yet it doesn't make a big deal of it, offering up the detail rather than hurling it at you.

In keeping with this, imaging is precise and stable, with good depth as well as width. As for tone, none of our listeners' comments suggest any hint of unevenness in the midband, nor did we detect any in our later sighted listening. Treble response is extended without being bright, and bass is extended, weighty and above all tuneful, being particularly confident with quiet low-frequency sounds.

The definition of where a note starts and stops seems particularly clear with this player, and this was of real benefit on the piano track, which sounded extremely solid and tangible. Only in female vocals did the sound seem just a touch muted and lacking in solidity. Or was that merely because of a couple of players we heard earlier that were just a shade brighter? At this level of refinement it's hard to tell. And yes, we do realise the implications of talking this way about what is, after all, a budget CD player: this one has some star quality which wouldn't embarrass it in the company of far more expensive machines. You can get a lot of CD player for under £500 these days, and this is a fine demonstration of just how much. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 83%

VALUE >> 87%

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **86%**

This stunner from Arcam is a neatly built and well-presented player that's excellent in some areas and never less than good in any of them. It's especially good at bass and timing, with detail hardly less assured.

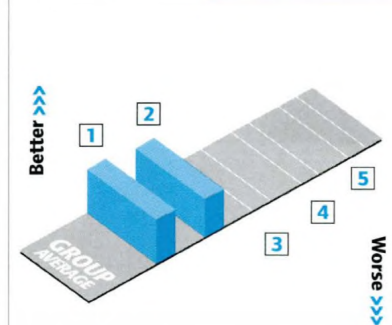


LAB REPORT

If the sonic performance of the CD73 is generous for the price, its measurements are outrageous. In almost every respect, it's pretty much state-of-the-art for CD replay and, indeed, at the edge of reliable measurement. Take distortion: worst-case figures of around 0.001% would be perfectly respectable for any high-priced exotica, as would the absence of any detectable signal-related distortion below about -20dB. Jitter is at or below the measurement threshold of about 120ps, and noise only a couple of dB worse than the very best figures we've seen.

The weakest measurement is the near-22kHz attenuation, which is no better than average, with just a little ultrasonic output above 24kHz too. There's also some audible mechanical noise from the transport, which we estimate at -85dB in a typical listening environment. The player inverts polarity (absolute phase), which can be easily corrected at the loudspeakers if desired.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +25%
- 2] Jitter >> +20%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 5] Digital filter >> 0%

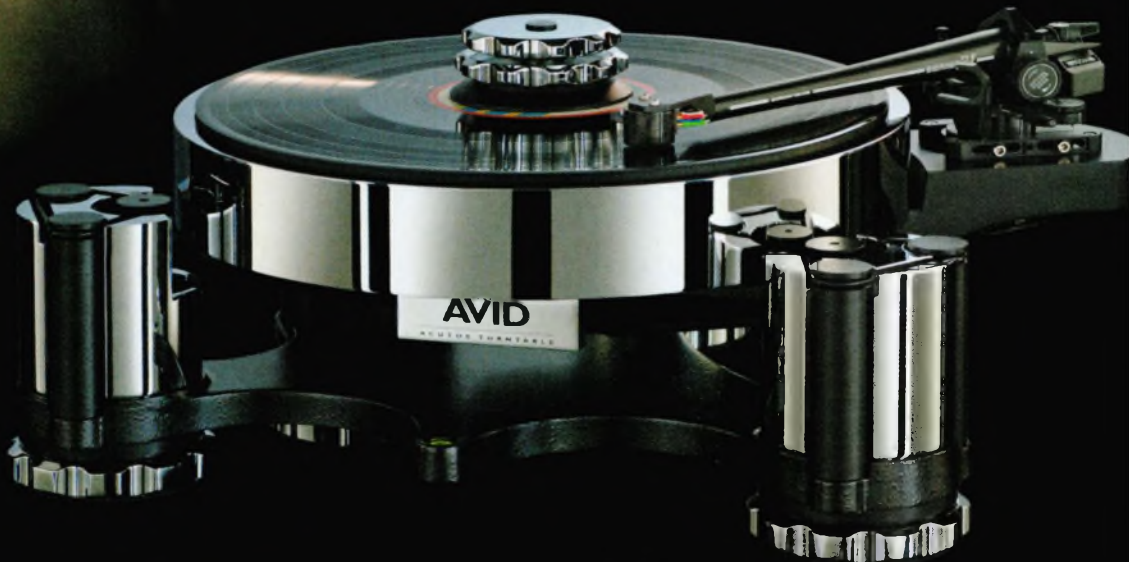
SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.2V	2.28V
Total harmonic distortion	0.003%	0.0008%
Signal-to-noise ratio	112dB	105dB



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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 740C

384kHz upsampling for £500? You'd better believe it...

If Advance Acoustic has the most high-end-looking player in the group, Cambridge Audio surely has the most technologically equipped. It's the only one to offer 384kHz upsampling – indeed, few players at any price offer such a feature. Cambridge introduced this a year or so ago in the Azur 840C player, and cajoled it into the cheaper 740C thanks to a few small economies in the DAC department and the omission of balanced output.

We've stated before that upsampling is no kind of magic formula – but if you're going to do it, then the higher the better. The possible pitfalls are the same whatever the chosen output frequency, and since part of the exercise is to facilitate near-perfect analogue filtering by assigning more of the total filtering task to digital circuits, one might as well follow that road as far as it goes. The other significant part of the exercise is jitter reduction, but there are plenty of different approaches to tackling that.

Cambridge employs upsampling know-how from Anagram Technologies, a Swiss firm more often associated with upmarket pro audio. The twin DACs are from Wolfson and are followed by analogue circuits made of good-quality parts, both active and passive. Ingeniously, the 740C adds digital inputs so its upsampling can add quality to other digital sources such as DAB/Freeview and MiniDisc. After the upsampling, you have the choice of the internal DACs or the digital outputs – which can't handle 384kHz, as the S/PDIF interface doesn't support this. The player offers very quick loading of discs, and about the only feature we can't warm to is the display, a rather bland grey-on-grey affair.

SOUND QUALITY

For some reason, this player didn't entirely chime with the tastes and expectations of our listening panel. As always, its output level was matched to that of the other players in the group, but two listeners felt it was louder than the rest. One even felt as if a 'loudness button' had been pressed somewhere, accentuating



the top and bottom at the expense of the midrange. Later, during the classical selections, he withdrew or at least qualified that statement, but he still didn't entirely care for the player's presentation, finding it flat and uninspiring.

It's worth noting that one listener made no mention of any perceived difference in listening level, and in fact found plenty to like, including tight but extended bass, light and airy treble and a good soundstage. Meanwhile, halfway through the presentation, the other listener, who initially also commented on loudness, felt things were back on track. He did, however, feel there was some coloration in the sound.

One thing the whole panel agreed on was that bass is good, well extended and firm, even if it's perhaps a little spotlight on occasion. What seems to be the root of the problem, judging by the comments, is the midrange, which is somewhat coloured, the extent apparently varying with dynamic level. But this is odd, as our previous encounter with a 740C revealed no such problem – and listening to this review sample sighted, after the panel had left, failed to convince us there's much, if anything, wrong with its midrange. Thus we find ourselves offering a cautiously qualified recommendation for this player, which does a lot right, but upset at least two listeners in one test. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 88%



BUILD >> 86%



VALUE >> 85%



A CD player and upsampling DAC in one, the 740C is a particularly handy model with good ergonomics and build – but somehow its sound failed to impress our listening panel, despite a good showing on its own.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **84%**

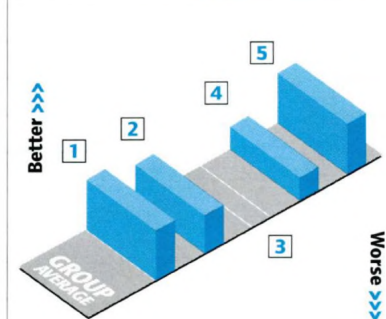


LAB REPORT

The Cambridge contender achieves another near-flawless performance in the lab, and by a narrow margin the best in the group. Distortion once again hovers around the measurement limit, while the jitter figure of 120ps is an estimated worst case – real performance is almost certainly even better, but it's hard to be sure.

The effect of the Anagram filter is seen in the near-22kHz attenuation, which is a better figure than most (though still not quite as rapid as we would like), and also in the general cleanliness of the noise spectrum, both with and without the presence of an audio signal. It's typical to see a few minute spikes sticking up even in the spectrum of a good player, but here there are none visible even down to -120dB, and the ultrasonic band is exceptionally clean too. There's certainly nothing obvious here to justify the criticisms made of the player by our panellists.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +30%
- 2] Jitter >> +20%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +10%
- 5] Digital filter >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	-	2.29V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0008%	0.0007%
Signal-to-noise ratio	113dB	106dB



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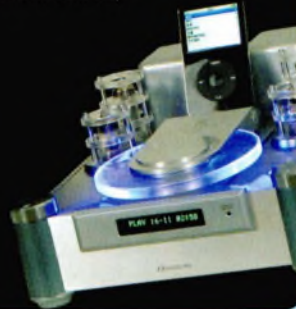


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GamuT CD-1 (£2995)	£1995
McIntosh MCD201, CD/SACD (£3400)	£2795
Meridian 508.24 CD player	£995
Musical Fidelity KW 250S (£4999)	£3795
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive CD player (£4000)	£2295
Shanling CD T80 CD player (£650)	£395
Sony SCD-1 SACD player (£5000)	£1995
Theta Chroma DAC	£295
Vincent CD 3 CD player (£800)	£649

AMPLIFIERS

Accuphase E408 Integrated (£5000)	£3995
Audio Zone AMP 1 dual mono integrated (£1595)	£1295
Audiolab 8000C and 8000P pre power combo	£399
Audiovalve Baldur 70 Monoblock power amp (£3100)	£1595
Bel Canto S300i Integrated (£1799)	£1495
Cairn 4810 Integrated (£2700)	£1795
Cyrus 8 amplifier and PSXR outboard power supply	£849

DK Design VS-1 Reference (£2500)	£1995
Minimax Power Amp (£995)	£649
Exposure 3010 Integrated (£1000)	£595
Flying Mole PA-S1 Digital Pre (£999)	£795
Krell FPB 300 Poweramp	£2995
Krell KAV 250P pre amplifier (£2495)	£1095
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Qinpu A-8000 MK II Integrated (£1295)	£795
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MARANTZ CD6002

The cheapest of the group, yet it more than holds its own

So new that our review sample was, at the time, the only one in the country, this model tops out Marantz's line of CD-only players, since all the dearer ones also play SACDs. You can read in this very issue our thoughts on how it pairs up with its matching amp, the PM6002, but here it performs on its own in direct competition with our other players, boasting the cheapest price tag of the group.

Not that much on the exterior gives that away. The specification is very similar to those of the other players, with the usual spread of outputs plus a headphone socket with level adjustment. The display offers CD Text and the logically laid-out front-panel buttons include the often missing search functions. The case is smart and well built and the innards offer some surprisingly good parts. Granted, the passive components are all essentially standard commercial-grade stuff and the transformer is a fairly small frame type, but the analogue circuits use Marantz's 'HDM' modules built up of numerous discrete transistors in preference to integrated-circuit op-amps, and the DAC chip is a recent high-performance one.

There's even a pitch-shift function, covering two semitones up or down in one per cent steps. This isn't intended for full-on hi-fi use, of course, and indeed there's something of a quality hit in using it, but the function can be useful for musicians or collectors of vintage reissues, not all of which are transferred at the right speed. Just like on a variable-speed LP player, pitch and speed change together.

SOUND QUALITY

Quite unaware that they were comparing this player with models costing up to twice as much, our listeners had plenty of good things to say about it. One found it a bit fuzzy and indistinct in places, and there was an isolated comment from another on mild congestion, but in tonal and dynamic terms, it seems there's very little wrong with the CD6002. Its bass is extended, strong and tuneful and made the most of all



the very varied musical selections, while treble also has good reach. That said, on occasion it can be a touch bright, particularly when the sound is very busy and rich in high frequencies.

Dynamics appear to be among the best in the group. The piano track drew praise for the agility with which the sound started and stopped on each note, while the excellent rhythmic qualities found in the Ian Dury selection were a further indication that dynamic contrast is well maintained, especially on a local timescale. Percussion was well reproduced throughout the music programme, and the ebb and flow of musical phrases was lovingly preserved.

It's worth noting that while female voice was singled out as a strong point, male vocals seemed less confident, with an unexpected degree of huskiness. Since no issues were raised regarding instruments in the same frequency range, it's not clear where the problem lies, but we subsequently felt it was another symptom of the slight brightness already noted. In fact, listening sighted to the player over a longer period, its brightness became more noticeable as time went on. All the same, we can only agree with the listening panel that this has no detrimental effect on detail, which is good going on excellent. Imaging is also admirable, and in many ways this player considerably exceeds expectations born of its price. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 83%



FEATURES >>> 86%



BUILD >>> 83%



VALUE >>> 87%



A hint of unevenness in the treble seems to be about the only specific flaw of this Marantz model, and its effects are pretty minimal. Otherwise, the player's performance is class-leading in most areas.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 85%

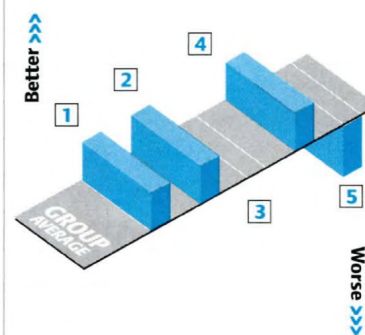


LAB REPORT

In certain areas the measured performance of this player is exceptionally good, noise being one such area, and distortion at levels a little below full output (2-10dB below, specifically – obviously an important range) another. The quoted distortion figure refers to a fraction of a decibel below full level, but drop the level by just a few dB and the distortion vanishes quicker than is normally the case, staying out of sight as output vanishes into noise. There's little or no increase in distortion with rising frequency.

Jitter is excellent, and the only surprise concerns the digital filter. This is an asymmetric type with more 'ringing' after the event than before, and while its response is broadly similar to those of most of the more familiar symmetric filters, in the near neighbourhood of 22kHz (half the sampling rate) it's a little slow to attenuate. Whether this is likely to be seriously audible is a moot point.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >>> +20%
- 2] Jitter >>> +20%
- 3] Linearity >>> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >>> +20%
- 5] Digital filter >>> -30%

SPECIFICATIONS

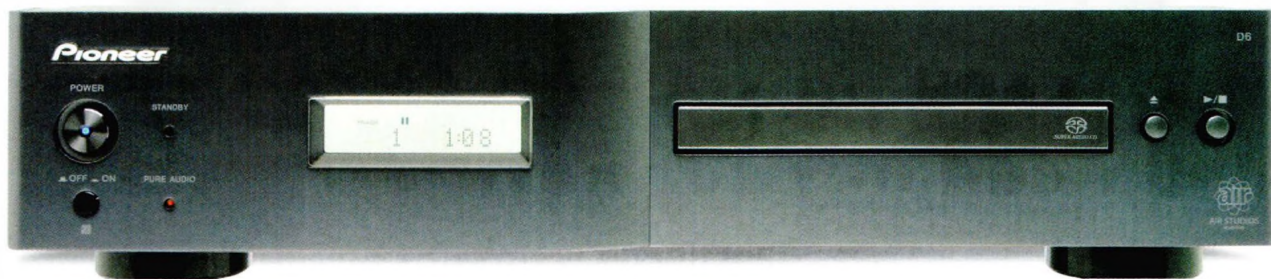
Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.35V	2.40V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.001%
Signal-to-noise ratio	110dB	107dB

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PIONEER PD-D6

A stylish, entertaining CD spinner that can also play SACDs

Pioneer is firmly back in the dedicated-audio-separates world, with this SACD player (one of the cheapest around) and a couple of amps in the 'G clef' range, all chock-full of audiophile credibility and tweaked at AIR Studios in north London. That Pioneer is backing SACD isn't surprising: it was at the forefront of high-sampling digital audio when it brought out the first 96kHz consumer product, a high-speed DAT recorder, a decade ago. Perhaps less expected is support for MP3 and WMA.

Another thing that's unsurprising, given that it's from Pioneer, is this unit's funky appearance. The front panel has a step in it that puts the display slightly forward, a subtle design feature we rather like. What we don't like is that the minimalist approach has extended to removing almost all functionality from the front panel. All you can do without the remote is insert a disc and start playing from the top, then stop and remove it again. The remote is small and slim and thus easily lost, and uses a coin-cell battery you probably won't have a replacement for when it runs out, so it's likely that at some point you'll find yourself cursing the D6 for its ergonomics. The display is a bit cussed too – it's slow and not as informative as it might be.

Inside the thin steel case, a dual-format PCM/DSD DAC handles CD and SACD data streams in their native format to minimise bit-twiddling, while the small frame transformer, op-amps and passive components are, while nothing fancy, perfectly respectable. Purists can switch off the display and digital outputs in 'Pure Audio' mode, and you have the choice of Legato Link or normal sharp anti-alias filtering. Mechanical noise is on the high side, and has a rather intrusive whistling character.

SOUND QUALITY

Our listening panel heard the D6 in its default Legato Link mode, though the brick-wall filter alternative was tried later in our own sighted listening. In the event, this player didn't sound that different from the rest, though it attracted



a few more comments about good timing than any other and was felt to be lively and bouncy in character. More than that, however, it was liked for its resolution and general musical involvement. Its treble can seem a bit bright – even slightly coarse – at times, but otherwise the sound is sophisticated and well integrated across the band, and detail is convincing.

Tonally, bass seems quite well extended: perhaps not the deepest in the group, but solid and tuneful. The midband, one listener noted, isn't totally free of coloration, but what there is seems to be just a touch of shyness in the upper bass that can slightly reduce the impact of male voice and instruments such as cello – and the cleanliness in the upper midrange compensates.

What really emerges from the listening notes, though, is the player's good recovery of small details, which helps it separate layers (tonal and spatial) within a well-balanced recording and creates highly convincing soundscapes. This seemed to us a touch better with Legato Link switched off, but the effect is obtained either way. Only with recordings that are already quite brash does the brightness become significantly noticeable, and this is the only real blemish on an otherwise well-rounded performance. SACD replay is likewise assured: we felt it a little lightweight, but it's certainly detailed. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 85%



FEATURES >>> 80%



BUILD >>> 81%



VALUE >>> 85%



With or without Legato Link in operation, this is a highly detailed player that clearly identifies different strands in a piece of music without divorcing them from each other. SACD is a bonus, the ergonomics a let-down.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE 84%

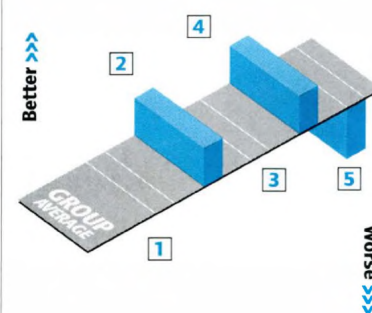


LAB REPORT

Legato Link filtering has the expected effect of slight attenuation in the audio band (very slight – almost nothing below 14kHz and only -4dB at 20kHz) and considerable aliasing between 22kHz and about 26kHz; otherwise it changes very little in the measurements. The 'sharp' filter, meanwhile, makes the model sound very similar to the Arcam. Noise-wise, this player is joint best in the group, while distortion is low but not class-leading. All the same, it's better than on most amps and varies little with frequency. It also vanishes, as one would hope, at lower output levels.

To our slight surprise we found a little jitter in the D6's output, with a mostly noise-like spectrum which we would expect to have very little effect on the sound in practice. In theory it worsens the noise floor somewhat in the presence of high-frequency audio, but real music just doesn't contain enough HF to make that a problem.

HOW IT COMPARES



1] Distortion >>> 0%

2] Jitter >>> +20%

3] Linearity >>> 0%

4] Dynamic range >>> +20%

5] Digital filter >>> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.28V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.002%
Signal-to-noise ratio	118dB	107dB

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SAXON CD300

This player from new brand Saxon is a unique, lively performer

Launching a new hi-fi brand just now may seem a trifle rash, but Saxon isn't entirely a newcomer, as it's allied to an established brand, Talk Electronics. Saxon's products are intended to sit beneath Talk's own, and among them this is the most basic CD player.

Basic it may be, but it's finished nicely enough with admirably clear labelling. The front panel itself is a decent chunk of aluminium, the rest of the case being the usual thin sheet-steel tray and aluminium lid. Inside is a Philips CD mechanism, flanked by a pair of neat and tidy circuit boards. On the left is the power supply, using an encapsulated (apparently toroidal) mains transformer and the usual smoothing and regulation components, with the audio board on the right, bearing a Wolfson DAC as well as a sample-rate converter chip. Saxon doesn't mention upsampling, and it's possible this is just functioning as a jitter-reducing buffer, a perfectly legitimate way of performing that task. A pair of fairly upmarket op-amps aided by good-quality passive components handles analogue output.

Saxon has fitted no digital output to this player, though dearer models do have one. That's really the only obvious economy, though another omission raised our eyebrows – there's no 'pause' function, on the front panel or the remote. We queried this with Saxon and were told this will be rectified in future players. We found the layout of the buttons a bit annoying: shouldn't 'stop' be next to 'play' and 'open' on the other side of the drawer? Never mind!

SOUND QUALITY

This player is clearly not entirely devoid of character, and as usually happens in such cases, opinions of the model hinged on the effect this has on various types of music, and how each listener perceived the result. Its character is lively – 'fast', even – and seemed especially pronounced in the solo piano track. Piano is notably tricky to record and reproduce, and of course one instrument varies from another, but



in this case one listener liked the result a lot, another found it a little overexcited and even messy, and the third spotted the difference, but didn't express a preference either way.

CD players tend not to differ that much from each other, and indeed this model is hardly a radical departure from the others, but it's good to be able to report some small distinguishing characteristics, especially when (as is decidedly the case here) the sound ticks all the boxes in other areas. There are no obvious tonal aberrations, for instance, and the bass seems particularly well balanced with the midrange, leading to very even-handed presentation. Detail is very good once again, and imaging is definitely among the best in the group. The opera track was chosen partly because it has unusually good image depth, and this player really made the most of it, placing the relatively remote female chorus in clear relation to the more forward orchestra and soloists.

Just occasionally the liveliness can lead to mild congestion when many bright-sounding instruments are playing at the same time – high saxophone plus cymbals, for instance. It's possible this is a function of the amp and speakers (we tried a few), but the end result is the same. It's a small price to pay, though, for an individual but generally highly likeable player with many good qualities. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%

FEATURES >> 75%

BUILD >> 84%

VALUE >> 84%

This Saxon player's dominant quality is its lively character, which thankfully doesn't detract from good detail and tonal neutrality. Occasional congestion and some mild ergonomic annoyances are the only drawbacks.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE 85%

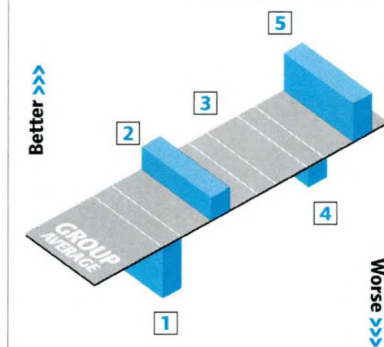


LAB REPORT

There are a few minor weaknesses in this player's performance, and it's a fair bet that they contribute to its sonic character. For instance, it suffers from some modulation of the noise floor with level, which we suspect has a digital rather than analogue cause, as there are also a few telltale spurious spikes on the spectrum, along with regular distortion. The sum total of distortions revealed under these conditions is hardly worse than -90dB, but they may nevertheless have a borderline effect.

There's also a trace of hum modulation, but jitter is very low, and if anything harmonic distortion is very slightly lower at high frequencies than it is in the midband. Noise is low as well, while the digital filter has a very similar response to that of the Cambridge Audio player – a touch more attenuation than most at 22kHz and near-perfect response above 24kHz, without any significant breakthrough of ultrasonic signals.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -30%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -10%
- 5] Digital filter >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	1.98V
Total harmonic distortion	-	0.004%
Signal-to-noise ratio	104dB	104dB

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CONCLUSIONS

More money doesn't necessarily mean an increase in musical performance

Possibly the most striking thing to come out of this group test is just how similar the overall level of performance is from all of these players, although their prices differ quite considerably. Leaving out the Advance Acoustic model, which we found both sonically and technically a bit of a disappointment (despite its visual attractiveness), we felt that the differences between the players were in many ways more to do with their sonic presentation than the absolute quality of the sound as

such. On that basis, once one takes into account the price, there would seem to be little to argue about – the Marantz walks it, followed very closely by the Pioneer, which does, after all, add SACD replay.

On the other hand, and factoring in the 'user experience', Arcam's baby is a highly attractive machine too, and for anyone whose interest lies entirely with conventional music CDs, it has, we reckon, more to offer than the Marantz model in rough proportion to its higher price, hence the tied scores for value. Overall,

the Arcam just takes the crown, we feel, but the small differences in overall scores say what needs to be said there (bearing in mind also the acknowledged existence of all kinds of high-end wonders at far higher prices).

The Cambridge Audio model is something of an enigma, shining considerably less brightly for our listening panel than it did either in its solo outing some months back or, it has to be said, after the panel had gone home. This leaves us unable to go overboard about it,

but despite the caveats, it certainly deserves a look.

What, though, can we say of poor Saxon? 'Poor', because although its model achieved a very good score, by building the player in Britain the company has waved goodbye to any chance of competing on the features front at a sensible price. But then again, who needs added features? If you don't, then it's a sonically talented machine with a subtly different take on events, which we're happy to commend on its own terms.

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HINTS AND TIPS

>> When auditioning CD players, be aware that their output levels usually differ slightly – and louder often sounds 'better' in quick-fire demonstrations.

>> CD players aren't that microphonic, but it can still be beneficial to keep them out of the firing line of speakers and use good-quality supports and/or damping devices

>> Some players need a little warm-up time to sound at their best. It's good to use the 'standby' switch, if there is one

>> If the option exists to switch off the display and any other circuits, take it

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE	Advance Acoustic	Arcam	Cambridge Audio	Marantz	Pioneer	Saxon
MODEL	MCD-20311	DiVA CD73	Azur 740C	CD6002	PD-D6	CD300
PRICE	£400	£450	£500	£280	£350	£600
SOUND						
FEATURES						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Upmarket build quality isn't entirely matched by the sound, which is a little indistinct and uninviting	A neatly built and well-presented player that's especially good at bass and timing, with detail hardly less assured	CD player and upsampling DAC in one, with good ergonomics and build – but the sound failed to impress our listening panel	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw – performance is class-leading in most areas.	A highly detailed player that clearly identifies different strands in a piece of music without divorcing them from each other.	Lively character doesn't detract from good detail and tonal neutrality. Occasional congestion and mild ergonomic annoyances are the only drawbacks
KEY FEATURES						
ELEC DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
OPT DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CD-RW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CD TEXT	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
BALANCED O/P	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
OTHER FORMATS	MP3	-	-	MP3, WMA	SACD, MP3, WMA	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
DISTORTION	0.004% G	0.0008% E	0.0007% E	0.001% E	0.002% G	0.004% G
JITTER	3ns P	<0.12ns E	<0.12ns E	<0.12ns E	<0.25ns G	<0.2ns E
LINEARITY	<0.2dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.2dB E
S/N RATIO	103dB G	105dB G	106dB G	107dB E	107dB E	104dB G
STOPBAND REJECTION	-105dB E	-105dB E	-115dB E	-110dB E	-100dB G	-100dB G



Get the best

“ Isn't it easy to buy a new system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price, you order the system, get a friend who knows his onions to install it – and live happily ever after. ”

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. It's likely that the system will help you lose interest in music pretty rapidly. The problem is that there are more myths about hi-fi than Aesop's Fables. CD gives you perfect sound. All CD players sound the same. A £50 CD player plays high fidelity music. All magazine reviewers are experts. Big speakers are always better than small ones. More watts per channel is everything. MP3 format gives you high quality. A collection of 'Best Buy' components will be a great system. And so on and so on... ALL MYTHS!

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SERVICE
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FACILITIES
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

VERDICT
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Music - the real aim

Our aim must be to buy a hi-fi system that will prove musically satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money. If the system doesn't excite you musically you've wasted your money. What is even worse is that you may not even realise you've bought a bad egg – you'll just switch the TV on instead and your desire to listen to music will gradually diminish. Have you ever been in a pub or club where you realise it's very difficult to conduct a conversation, even to the extent of being really tiring? A poor quality system continuously distorts but I don't mean it necessarily reaches the point of audibly breaking up. With a top quality system you can play music very loudly and still hold a conversation because it's free of distortion. A poor system is tiring to listen to even when it's played at low volume. If you want proof, go into a shoe or clothes shop where they play background 'music' and try to enjoy listening. It's odds on you'll fail.



What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. – So where do you start? Here's an important tip...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE.

There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. Again, just myths. Most specialist hi-fi dealers are running their business because, above all, they love music. They spend a large portion of their time listening to music and comparing systems to get the best possible result. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Hi-Fi for your money....

Buying or being sold to?

Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problem you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by commendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about more than just a good price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are **20 OF THE BEST HI-FI SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY**. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.



...Ask our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

LONDON

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road.
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS

61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2043

SOUTH

Aldermaston, Berkshire

HIFICINEMA

Mars House, Calleva Park.
0118 982 0402

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI

40 High Street.
01233 624441

Brighton

THE POWERPLANT

40 Church Road, Hove.
01273 775542

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street.
01245 265245

Colchester

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

33 Sir Isaac's Walk.
01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY

9 High Street Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High Street.
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road.
01702 435255

Southampton

PHASE 3 HI-FI

37 Bedford Place.
023 8022 8434

Worthing

PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road.
01903 245577

SOUTH WEST

Bath AUDIENCE

14 Broad Street.
01225 333310

MIDLANDS

Banbury

OVERTURE

3 Church Lane.
01295 272158

Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY

152a High Street, Bloxwich.
01922 493499

Birmingham

MUSIC MATTERS

363 Hagley Road, Edgbaston.
0121 429 2811

Coventry FRANK HARVEY

163 Spon Street.
024 7652 5200

Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel Street.
0116 262 3754

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way.
0115 9584404

Stafford

ACOUSTICA

114 Wolverhampton Road.
01785 258216

NORTH

Cheadle

THE AUDIO WORKS

14 Stockport Road.
0161 428 7887

Chester

ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road.
01244 344227

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS

184 Fitzwilliam St.
0114 275 6048

York

SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

Gateshead

LINTONE AUDIO

7-11 Park Lane, Gateshead.
0191 477 4167

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

LOUD & CLEAR

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

Glasgow

LOUD & CLEAR

520 St Vincent St, Finnieston.
0141 221 0221

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI

429-431 Lisburn Rd.
028 90 381296

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YOUR FREE GIFT!

When you subscribe to *Hi-Fi Choice* by Direct Debit, you don't just get a hefty discount off the normal shop price – this month you'll also receive a free Cambridge Audio Azur Reference interconnect worth £50 into the bargain!

As any hi-fi aficionado knows, the quality of interconnect cables used between components in a hi-fi system is crucial to the overall sound. The Azur Reference interconnect offers incredible performance – a fat 8mm-diameter cable with silver-plated copper and twin screens results in a significantly better sonic performance than many cables costing significantly more. At its usual retail price of £50, it's a bargain upgrade; but if you subscribe to *Hi-Fi Choice* by Direct Debit this month, you'll get one absolutely free! Stocks are limited, however, so hurry!

For more information on the Cambridge Audio Azur electronics range, call on 0870 900 1000, or visit www.cambridgeaudio.com



 **Cambridge Audio**

“What’s most striking about the sound is its airy agility, the treble really stands out as exceptional among sub-£100 cables we’ve heard”

Azur Reference review: Hi-Fi Choice, August 2007 (issue 296)

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See page 80 for more details...

DEFINITIVE AUDIO



Main image: KSL Kondo Gakuon valve amplifiers.



L to R: 1. Kuzma Stabi XL 2. Art Audio Concerto Stereo Amplifier (GE) 3. Living Voice IBX R2 (Burr Oak) 4. SME 10 / SME V
5. Living Voice OBX RW (Santos) 6. KSL Kondo Ongaku Integrated Amplifier 7. Magnum Dynalab 106T Valve Tuner
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MANCHESTER 0161 831 7969

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Denon AVR2807 AV Receiver	£519.00
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M&K K7 Surround Speaker	£175.00
Monitor Audio GS10 Speakers	£509.00
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Pioneer VSX2016 AV Receiver	£149.00
Priamre DVD26 DVD Player	£599.00
Yamaha RXV1700 AV Receiver	£449.00
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Yamaha YSP900 Digital Surround Projector	£389.00

NORWICH 01603 767605

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Project Xpression II Turntable	£185.00
REL R305 Sub Woofer	£599.00
REL R505 Sub Woofer	£649.00
Yamaha DVDS1700 DVD Player	£299.00
Yamaha DVDS2700 DVD Player	£749.00
Yamaha RXV1700 AV Receiver	£579.00
Yamaha RXV2700 AV Receiver	£839.00

PETERBOROUGH 01733 897697

Arcam DVA A80 Amplifier	£419.00
Arcam DVA P80 Power Amplifier	£299.00
Arcam FMJ DV139 DVD Player	£1,169.00
Arcam FMJ AV9 AV Processor	£2,435.00
Arcam FMJ P7 AV Power Amplifier	£1,885.00
Cyrus CD6s CD Player	£485.00
Cyrus CDBx CD Player	£749.00
Denon AVR2807 AV Receiver	£519.00
KEF IQ1 Speakers	£149.00
KEF IQ6c Centre Speaker	£199.00
KEF IQ7 Speakers	£389.00
KEF IQ8ds Surround Speakers	£259.00
Marantz SR8001 AV Receiver	£779.00
Yamaha RXV1700 AV Receiver	£449.00
Yamaha RXV2700 AV Receiver	£649.00

SHEFFIELD 0114 255 5861

B&W XT2 Speakers (Inc Stands)	£615.00
B&W XTC Centre Speaker	£325.00
Harman Kardon HD970 CD Player	£195.00
Marantz SR4001 AV Receiver	£245.00
Marantz SR5001 AV Receiver	£309.00
Marantz SR6001 AV Receiver	£449.00
Marantz SR7001 AV Receiver	£585.00
Yamaha RXV2700 AV Receiver	£845.00

SOUTHAMPTON 023 8033 7770

Arcam DVA DV135 DVD Player	£669.00
B&W CMC Maple Centre Speaker	£259.00
Cyrus 6 Power Power Amplifier	£299.00
Cyrus 8 Power Power Amplifier	£519.00
Cyrus PSXR Power Supply	£299.00
Denon DV2930 DVD Player	£479.00
Marantz SR7001 AV Receiver	£669.00
Marantz CD50010SE CD Player	£179.00
Marantz PM11 S1 Amplifier	£1,599.00
Marantz PM4001OSE Amplifier	£1,79.00
Marantz PM7001 Amplifier	£259.00
Marantz SA7001 KI CD Player	£449.00
Marantz SR4001 AV Receiver	£259.00
Marantz SR5001 AV Receiver	£339.00
Marantz SR6001 AV Receiver	£519.00
Marantz SR8001 AV Receiver	£899.00
Marantz ST15 S1 DAB Tuner	£519.00
Marantz VP11 S1 DLP Projector	£7,499.00
Pioneer BDPX70 Blu-Ray Player	£749.00
Q Acoustics 1000s Sub Woofer	£129.00
Samsung PS63P76FX Plasma	£3,499.00
Yamaha DVDS2700 DVD Player	£749.00
Yamaha RXV1700 AV Receiver	£579.00

SOUTHGATE 020 8836 2777

Denon AVR1907 AV Receiver	£299.00
Denon DVD2910 DVD Player	£349.00

Denon S301 DVD System	£899.00
Pioneer VSX516 AV Receiver	£199.00
Yamaha DVDS1700 DVD Player	£299.00

STAINES 01784 460777

Arcam Alto Speakers	£285.00
Monitor Audio G560 Speakers	£1,499.00
Monitor Audio GSLCR Surround Speaker	£369.00
Project Xpression 2 Turntable	£185.00

SWINDON 01793 610992

Arcam DVA DV78 DVD Player	£485.00
Denon AVR1507 AV Receiver	£185.00
Denon AVR2807 AV Receiver	£599.00
Denon DVD1930 DVD Player	£185.00
Denon DVD2930 DVD Player	£485.00
Quad L-Sub Sub Woofer	£449.00
Roksan Kandy/II Amplifier	£419.00
Roksan Kandy Power Amplifier	£355.00
Sim2 Domino D35 DLP Projector	£2,249.00
Toshiba 37WL168 LCD TV	£819.00
Yamaha DSPAX 759 AV Amplifier	£355.00
Yamaha DSP29 AV Amplifier	£1,949.00
Yamaha DVDS2500 DVD Player	£449.00
Yamaha DVDS2700 DVD Player	£649.00
Yamaha RXN6000 AV/DAB Receiver	£449.00
Yamaha YSP1000 Digital Surround Projector	£579.00

WATFORD 01923 213533

B&W CCM646 In-Ceiling Speaker	£109.00
B&W CM1 Speakers	£369.00
B&W CM7 Speakers	£749.00
Denon AVR1507 AV Receiver	£159.00
Denon AVR1907 AV Receiver	£299.00
Denon AVR1907 AV Receiver	£259.00
Fujitsu P42XH45 Plasma Screen	£1,719.00
KEF HTS2001 Centre Speaker Stands	£59.00
KEF IQ2: Centre Speaker	£95.00
KEF IQ6c Centre Speaker	£189.00
KEF KHT2005 AV Speaker Package	£559.00
Monitor Audio Radius 360 Sub Woofer	£225.00
Meridian G56 Power Amplifier	£939.00
Meridian G98DH DVD Transport	£2,175.00
Meridian G1 Pre Amplifier	£939.00
Q Acoustics 1010s Sub Woofer	£75.00
Speakercraft CR5E In-Ceiling Speaker	£69.00
Wharfedale Diamond 9 Centre Speaker	£59.00
Yamaha RXV2700 AV Receiver	£749.00

WITHAM 01376 501733

Arcam DVA A90 Amplifier	£709.00
Arcam CD37 CD Player	£335.00
Arcam DVA T61 Tuner	£159.00
Audiolab 8000CD CD Player	£389.00
Creek Destiny CD Player	£899.00
Cyrus CDBS CD Player	£485.00
Cyrus CDBX CD Player	£749.00
Denon DV2930 DVD Player	£819.00
Fujitsu P50XH458US Plasma Monitor	£2,469.00
Isotek G11 Mini-Sub Mains Conditioner	£449.00
Isotek Multiway 6 Way Mains Block	£165.00
Isotek Orion 6 Way Mains Block	£299.00
KEF IQ9 Speakers	£599.00
Monitor PDP507XD Plasma TV	£1,605.00
Sim2 Domino D35 DLP Projector	£1,949.00
Yamaha DSPAX 759SE AV Amplifier	£355.00
Yamaha DVDS2700 DVD Player	£649.00
Yamaha RXN6000 AV/DAB Receiver	£389.00
Yamaha YSP900 Digital Sound Projector	£749.00

WOLVERHAMPTON

HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and multichannel gear you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, plus useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most stringent techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

Products that score more than 80 per cent overall are automatically considered for inclusion in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best, there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

SUPER AUDIO CD

SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has the potential for uncompressed surround sound using up to six channels, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio – these are listed in our DVD section.



Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output – and most do.

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1 kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

TOP BUYS



Rega Apollo £498

Rega's latest entry-level player is a splendidly musical performer, given its modest price. Bass is good, midrange is great and high frequencies are truly exceptional.



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

Sitting at the top of Cambridge Audio's Azur range, the 840C is a technically innovative player with a sound that belies its sub-£1,000 price – open, subtle and refined.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000												
BB	Audio Analogue Rossini	850	Valve-sporting player delivers a warm, engaging sound, but mediocre remote and no optical out may limit appeal									299
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player									285
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative									293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully undemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing: enhanced by flexibility as a DAC									291
	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift: otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value									285
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)									270
	Denon DCD-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality									295
	Denon DCD-700AE	250	Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay									284
	Marantz SA7001	430	Easy, relaxed sound arguably lacks true grit, but is extremely listenable from CD and SACD									281
	Naim CD5i	825	Bass has great extension but lacks control, slightly. Tonal neutrality higher up is excellent, however									291
	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation: smaller-scale works can lack focus									291
	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer									285
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance									276
	Vincent CD-S6 MkII	999	With its tube output stage, a beguiling midrange, sweet highs and attractively figured lows plus fine dynamics									287
ABOVE \$1,000												
	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender									281
	Bryston BCD-1	2,050	Not as open as some but rather more timely than most, it sounds a lot more gripping than it looks									300
EC	Chord Red Reference CD	13,345	The definitive statement in Red Book CD playing, this player's look and sound places it at the top of the tree									299
	Classe CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced									286
EC	Classe CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs									284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too									280
	Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R	1,400	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer too									295
EC	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat									285
EC	Garnut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music									289
EC	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output									289
	Leema Antlia	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best									291
	Linn Majk	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm									283
EC	Marantz SA-7S1	5,000	Something of a bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk									297
	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.									284
	Meridian G06	1,695	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands									295
EC	Moon Supernova	4,500	Refined, high-performance player offers tremendous transparency and includes coaxial digital input									296
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY v8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system									288
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance									280
	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character									295
	Unison Research Unico CD	1,495	Strong timing and rhythm, this player is well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution									295

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Copland CDA823 £1,750

This distinguished, yet minimalist Scandinavian CD player combines a real ear for detail with full-scale dynamics and an effortless musical style. A genuine hi-fi star.



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

Esoteric's entry-level CD/SACD player delivers astonishing sonic detail and precision, coupled with a gorgeous sense of musical structure. Truly, it's brilliant.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can use



a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround sound benefits that the format specialises in.

DVD-AUDIO

DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for information – lyrics, images and so on. To save

you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

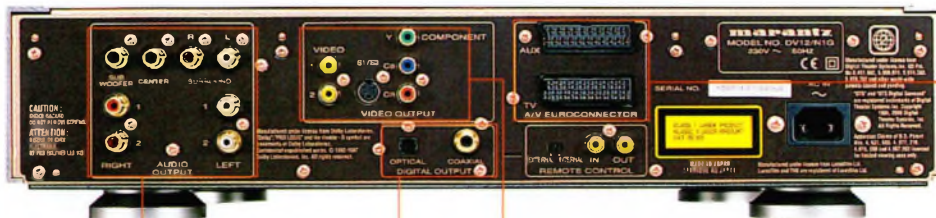
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-Video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

SCART CONNECTIONS: These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV135	900	Unchanged looks and stereo-only DVD-A/SACD, but the overall performance is great across all formats. Stunning picture, too						296
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem						276
	Marantz DV7001	600	Enhanced model based on DV6001, but with various improvements, including superior CD replay capabilities						296
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation						274
	NAD T585	800	Easy to live with universal player that shows clear signs of rejuvenation of the Classic range						294
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video						275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star						274
	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs						280
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Accoustic Arts Surr Player 1	4,495	A very high-quality Pioneer-based machine, excellent sound from both hi-res and regular formats						299
	Arcam DiVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing						285
	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing						287
EC	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multiformat non-video player doesn't have huge transparency or a fancy box, but is musically addictive						299
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat						280
EC	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
EC	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio						263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity						279
EC	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD						270

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes.
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver.
HEADPHONE SOCKET Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player

TOP BUYS



Marantz DV7600 £600

A universal player that's strong with all formats, including music on CD/SACD/DVD-A.



NAD T585 £800

This universal player borrows from NAD's Masters Series to make a cracking all-rounder.



Arcam DiVA DV135 £900

Stereo-only SACD and DVD-A, but excellent performance with audio and video.



Meridian G98AH £3,625

A digital *tour de force* – as exceptional with both audio and video as you'd expect.

ONE CATALOGUE . . .

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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages

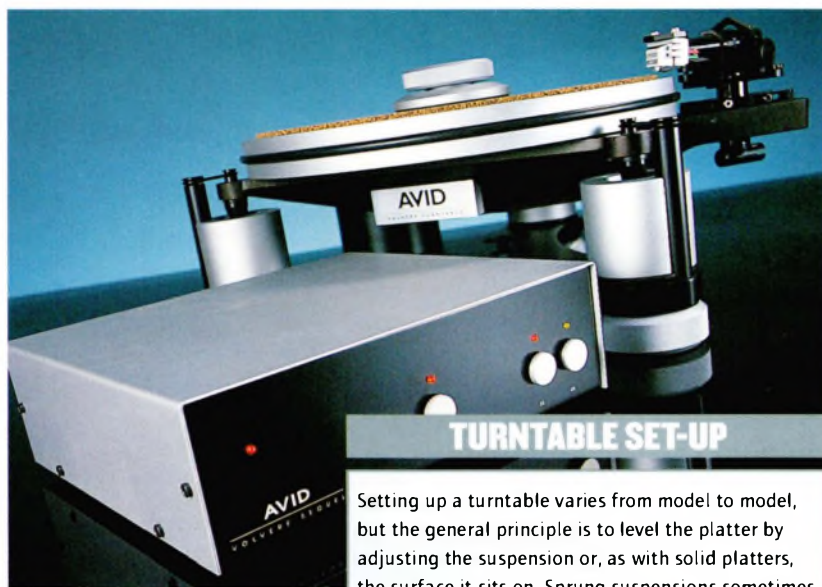


Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.

There are two types of phono



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



Pro-Ject RPM 5 £400

Pro-Ject's entry-level RPM deck is a good-looking, great-sounding package that delivers terrific value for money. A class act and no mistake.



The Funk Firm Funk V £760

The more costly of two turntables from The Funk Firm, the Funk V builds on its sibling's virtues to deliver a sound of sheer class – dynamic, detailed and refined.



Clearaudio Champion £1,475

Current king of acrylic, the Clearaudio deck, arm and cartridge combination turns in a beautifully well-balanced delivery, but choose your support wisely.



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

Avid has been one of the most impressive exponents of the vinyl arts in recent years, and this mid-range deck is a stunning example of analogue engineering.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Avid Volvere	2,750	A combination of a heavy platter with a sprung suspension that makes the vinyl it spins sound powerful and solid	33/45				298
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45				229
	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45				268
	Clearaudio Performance	1,670	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance. Good arm and cartridge	33/45				295
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45				271
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78			opt	276
	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45			opt	279
	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45			opt opt	284
	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45				266
	Micell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45				268
EC	Micell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45				235
	Pro-Ject Expression II	250	A smooth and engaging turntable with the ability to revel in the glory of vinyl, with upgradable arm cable	33/45				289
	Pro-Ject RPM 5	400	Great looks plus an on the ball, engaging sound that puts it in the serious league, needs good isolation for best results	33/45				279
	Pro-Ject RPM 6.1	550	With its minimal chassis and huge platter this is a steady design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge	33/45/78				294
BB	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45				268
	Rega P3-24	398	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply	33/45			opt	298
	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			opt	257
	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45				228
	Roksan Radius 5/Mini	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45				248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45				195
EC	SME 20/12A	11,133	Brings a calmness and precision to vinyl replay that we have rarely encountered, build quality is second to none	33/45/78				293
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45				259

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm				266
	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around				285
	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss				235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality				215
	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound				290
	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				270
	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light				235
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for				265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money				253

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	Tested with the almost-as-good £40 540P, this remarkable phono stage brings refinement and bass weight to budget vinyl					277
	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound					268
	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money					245
	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!					234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP					201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility					234

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

SME

The way to play vinyl

Model 10A



Model 20/2A



Model 20/12A



Model 30/2A



Series M2



Series 300



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Series V



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Jason Kennedy, *HIFI Choice* April 07



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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is now said to be available to more than 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital entirely, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU-1800DAB £250
Combines DAB with FM/AM reception and good all-round design at a tempting price.



Creek T50 £550
A thoroughly accomplished AM/FM tuner with a substantial and detailed sound.



T+A T1210R £1,000
This FM tuner looks, feels and sounds top-notch – great detail and imaging.



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195
FM tuner with valves – 'affordable' for an MD, but still streets ahead of most radios.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ESQ. NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM, M, L	128					251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto	FM, M, L	100					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, but the decent performance on both bands makes this a great dual-band choice	DAB, FM, M	200					283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt			257
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!	200						283
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM, M	30					250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB, FM, M	99					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM, M	20					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM, M	30					242
<input type="checkbox"/>	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100					283
DAB TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DVA DT91	450	Some grain at low levels, but sound is lively, large in scale and tonally very natural. Very smart!	DAB, FM	16					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10					248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	200	Very good detail and a highly believable impression of real musicians playing. Imaging can be a little constricted	DAB, FM, M	200					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST7001	250	Midband detailed and precise: treble can be thick but bass is extended, and sound generally energetic	DAB, FM, M	200					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C445	300	FM is laid-back despite bright balance, but has good detail. DAB slightly livelier than most	DAB, FM	30					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Onkyo T-4555DAB	350	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard in all areas on	DAB, FM	40					299

SPECS KEY **WAVEBANDS** Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. **PRESETS** How many stations can be stored in memory. **RDS** Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). **REMOTE CONTROL** For the couch potato. **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER** Useful for setting up an aerial. **ROTARY TUNING KNOB** An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

Perfection is closer than ever!

B O U L D E R 8 6 5 I N T E G R A T E D

"The 850s consistently created a soundstage that wrapped around my ears and dissolved the walls of my listening room. As I noted at one point in my audition, "the soundstage ate my speakers and then it ate my room." Not only was the soundstage wide and tall, it was, depending on the piece, deeper than I have ever before heard in my listening room."

Max Shepherd. The Absolute Sound. Nov 2006

"...my advice would be to go for Boulder hook, line, and sinker. Taken as a system, the three elements that make up the 2000 Series are about as perfect as they come."

Jonathan Scull. Stereophile, Sep 1998



High-performance sound has always meant separate components, numerous cables, and large space requirements. Convenient, integrated solutions always fell short when it came to exceptional sound quality. Until now.

Based on the 810 Stereo Preamplifier and the 860 Stereo Amplifier, the 865 Integrated Amplifier includes preamplifier features normally reserved for much more expensive equipment. A discrete-resistor step volume control, first developed for Boulder's 2010 Stereo Preamplifier, allows precise 0.5 dB level adjustment—even with the remote. Full-balanced, differential, three-stage input circuitry results in ultra-low distortion and noise. A large, dimmable alpha-numeric display provides easy to read information for status and control, even at a

distance. A home theater bypass circuit for multi-use systems, individual input programmability for source level matching and setup, and selectable fixed or variable auxiliary balanced outputs assure exceptional system flexibility. Additional control is provided by Boulderlink connections for complete system monitoring, an IR input for external control system integration, and by a 12V trigger for remote amplifier turn-on. Nevertheless, the 865 is not difficult to use. But the preamplifier section is only the beginning. The 865's output stage is a formidable source of power for any loudspeaker. Capable of 150 watts per channel, the 865 Integrated punches its way through the most spirited and demanding passages, while gracefully revealing the subtle details that make music astonishingly spacious and infinitely involving. Rugged binding posts require no tools for tightening and provide a secure, low-impedance connection

for optimal power transfer. A precise bias control system monitors the output section and keeps the amplifier within its ideal operating range. Finally, the 865 is safeguarded by thermal limiting and over-current sensing circuitry which provide it with rock solid reliability without the slightest effect on sound quality.

The 865 Integrated Amplifier combines convenience and exceptional performance in a single component. Meticulously crafted to solidify the relationship between listener and music, its ability to create this connection is reflected by laboratory measurements in concert with the pleasure experienced by the most critical ears. Boulder has finally given you the opportunity you've been waiting for. If you've been dreaming of owning a Boulder, your audition awaits.

Boulder

Boulder Dealers:

North: Lintone Audio, (t) 0191 477 4167

Middlandst: Zouch Audio, (t) 01530 414 128

South: Sounds of Music, (t) 01435 865 212

Ireland: Kronos Hi-Fi, (t) 028 8775 3606



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DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard disk drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
CDR-HD1500 £599

Combining hard disk with CD-R adds flexibility to digital audio recording.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Cambridge Audio
Azur 640H £600

Rip and store CD tracks on hard disk, create playlists, connect to a PC and more.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Hermstedt
Hifidelo Pro £850

160GB hard disk and CD-R/RW drive in a box – as music servers go, this is a cracker.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Imerge
S3000 £2,800

A flexible audio server that's well designed, easy to use and sounds great too!

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELECTRONIC IN/OUTPUTS	SCALE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1				218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1				233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2				243
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2				233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1				205
	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1				243
	Pioneer PDR-WB39	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1				218
MD RECORDERS								
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducingly that receives its recommendation owing to the price	1				205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1				233
HDD RECORDERS								
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160			276
	Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160			280
	Imerge S3000	2,800	Thought-out solution to the problem of storing, sorting and accessing a music collection. Sound wouldn't shame a good midrange CD player	1	160			291
	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250			278

DECKS Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

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902I SPEAKERS
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CD PLAYER

Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2

"Does most things extremely well and has a remarkably good sense of poise for the money."

- Hi-Fi Choice magazine

Usual Price £249.95



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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005

AMPLIFIER

Cambridge Audio Azur 540A v2

"Amazing solidity and focus, excellent rhythmical ability; sounds natural and realistic."

- WHF? S&V magazine

100 WPC. Usual Price £249.95

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005

BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

Mordaunt-Short 902i

"They sound remarkable; their clear and spacious sound opens music up"

- WHF? S&V magazine

65 WPC. Usual Price £149.95

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005

SYSTEM USUALLY £649.85

Cambridge Audio units are available in silver & black

SAVE
£150

£499.95

5YR Supercare Only £49.95

CD PLAYER

Cambridge Audio Azur 740C

"Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative."

- Hi-Fi Choice magazine

Usual Price £499.95



AMPLIFIER

Cambridge Audio Azur 740A

"Excellent treble, very good imaging and a real sense of musical involvement are all well above the class average."

- Hi-Fi Choice magazine

100 WPC. Usual Price £499.95



FLOORSTANDERS

KEF iQ7

KEF speakers are world renowned for their quality and innovation and, with speakers like the IQ7, it's easy to see why.

150 WPC. Usual Price £499.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2006

SYSTEM USUALLY £1499.85

Cambridge Audio units are available in silver & black

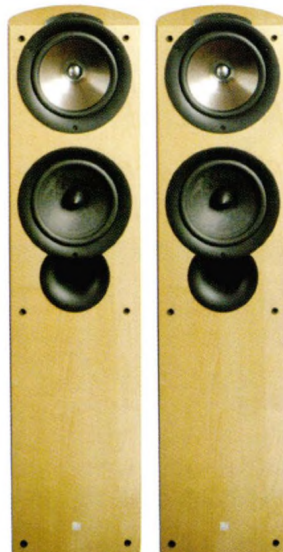
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£500

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HI-FI SYSTEM MEGA-BARGAIN

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 740A & AZUR 740C & KEF iQ7



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CD & AMP TOGETHER
AND GET THESE
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As a taster of what we have in-store we've pulled together some offers for Hi-Fi Choice readers. A mix of award-winners, great deals and some Christmas gift ideas.

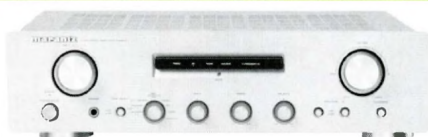
Two cracking system deals based around the Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Cambridge Audio separates lead the way, and as a nod to all you iPod owners, two dock deals from KEF and Audica that actually sound good!

With the Evoke 1XT, in its real wood veneer, tri-band guise at the price of a standard one and a selection of top brand separates, its never been a better time to come in-store and check out our amazing deals.



AMPLIFIER

MARANTZ PM40010SE



Thanks to long and tortuous hours of listening sessions, Marantz have fine-tuned the PM4001 to produce one of the finest sounding amplifiers in its class. Bass is tighter and blends seamlessly with the mid-range. Stereo imagery is both wider and more precise. Best of all, the feeling of actually "being there" is greatly enhanced. TSP £249.95

Also Marantz CD50010SE (Silver) for only £149.95

SAVE £100 **£149.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £14.95

IPOD DOCK

KEF PICOFORTE BLACK



From the makers of some of the most successful speakers over the past 45 years, comes an iPod dock that's serious about sound. TSP £249.95

SAVE £50 **£199.95**

iPod Not Included

PORTABLE DAB

PURE EVOKE 1XT PRESTIGE



Key to the Evoke 1XT Prestige's appeal is the tri-band station facility. Twin DAB sections (Band III and L-Band) means that more DAB radio stations can be picked up than ever before. In addition to this, the luxury real-wood finish has Christmas present written all over it. TSP £99.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VALUE ★★★★★

Also available in maple

SAVE £20 **£79.95**

IPOD DOCK

AUDICA MPS-1



We at Richer Sounds appreciate the Audica MPS-1 may not reach the standards of full size hi-fi systems but, by the standards of the usual iPod docs, it's a revelation! TSP £249.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VALUE ★★★★★

SAVE £150 **£99.95**

iPod Not Included

MINI STEREO SYSTEM

YAMAHA CRXM170



"An excellent micro: well-designed, sensibly priced and with a performance that earns it our acclaim." - WHF? S&V magazine. TSP £219.95

SAVE £70 **£149.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £14.95

FLOORSTANDER SPEAKERS

MORDAUNT-SHORT 906i



"The Avant 906i is a very decent performer overall, especially in view of its very modest price... Well balanced overall, with the sort of top end restraint entirely appropriate for the equipment the speaker is likely to be partnered with. The bass end has impressive weight, boxiness is pretty well controlled and imaging is very effective." said Hi-Fi Choice magazine when reviewing the 906i at a price of £350.

BEST BUY HI-FI CHOICE magazine

150 Watts

SAVE £70 **£249.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £24.95

BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

TANNOY F1



"A great budget speaker - whether on the end of a micro system or budget separates." WHF? S&V magazine. For a top quality, compact speaker that will suit a wide variety of components, the Tannoy Custom F1 comes highly recommended.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VALUE ★★★★★

AMAZING VALUE **£89.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £89.95

FLOORSTANDER SPEAKERS

CELESTION F30



Celestion have one of the most solid reputations when it comes to making quality loudspeakers, and the F30s are no exception. Luxuriously finished in a dark apple veneer, these look as good as they sound! Don't believe us, then come down to your local store and we'll talk you through some of the F30s other features. TSP £199.95

120 Watts

SAVE £50 **£149.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £14.95

TUNERS

DENON TU1800 DAB



"By any sane standards, at this attractive price, the TU1800DAB is a mighty capable component and a worthy successor to the long-standing and justly famous TU260L" said Hi-Fi Choice magazine when reviewing the Denon TU1800DAB at a price of £250.



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VALUE ★★★★★

SAVE £70 **£179.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £17.95

FLOORSTANDER SPEAKERS

KEF IQ5



Key to the KEF IQ5 is KEF's unique Uni-Q treble system. Essentially, this involves positioning the treble unit within the throat of the woofer, thus creating a single point source for sound across the frequency spectrum. The end result of this is a broader, more cohesive sound that once experienced makes it hard to go back to conventional speakers. Titanium coated, aluminium tweeters provide crystalline precision, with a smooth, even response. TSP £399.95

150 Watts

SAVE £100 **£299.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £29.95

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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



Marantz
PM7001 £350

If you thought the PM7200 was a great budget amp, just wait until you hear this! Its sound is so detailed and involving, you'll think it costs twice the price.



Cyrus
6vs2 £600

The latest 'singing shoebox' from Cyrus is an absolute peach! Strong rhythmic flow, tunelessly extended bass and excellent stereo imaging are among the highlights.



Primare
I30 £1,500

Are you looking for an amp that combines weight and musical gravitas with rhythm, detail and subtlety, with gorgeous build quality to boot? In that case... here it is!



Copland
CTA405 £2,498

This amp's massively enjoyable musicality is hard to beat: all the effusiveness of a great valve amp and none of the stereotypical softness. Brilliant!

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam DiVAA70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM			60	289
	Adv Acoustic MAP305DA II	600	A lot of amplifier for the money and capable of revealing and exciting sound in the right company. Includes 4 digital inputs	5				100	300
	Arcam DVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt			90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	500	Ticks all the boxes for bass, clarity, imaging etc. and invites the listener into the music with uncommon grace	6				100	294
	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	750	The biggest differences between this and most amps at twice its price are in looks and show-off factor. Powerful and detailed	8				120	299
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt			85	283
	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7				40	293
	Denon PMA-700AE	250	One of a growing number of new low cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels	4	MM			50	284
	Flying Mole CA-S10	1,000	The Mole makes a mountain of detailed sound from its digital circuitry, if you choose your speakers well it's a short-cut to hi-fi nirvana	3				100	291
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Marantz PM7001KI	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM			70	289
	Musical Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3				70	288
	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5				80	278
	Pioneer A-A9	600	Takes on the mantle of the legendary A400. Not as cuddly, but very resolute and revealing for the money. Has USB input	4				80	296
	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM			50	293
	Vincent SV-236	999	Valve hybrid whose sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling, short on neutrality but high on sparkle	6				100	295
ABOVE £1,000									
EDITOR'S CHOICE	AMR AM-77	4,400	A thrilling amplifier that brings you the dynamics of valves with the power of transistors in a substantial but well featured design	6				180	299
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8				100	280
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6				100	275
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6				130	281
	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM			50	286
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6				100	286
	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt			60	292
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100	277
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6				180	275
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4				200	289
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5				150	288
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4				250	295
EDITOR'S CHOICE	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7				180	285
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim SuperNait	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6				80	294
	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3				30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt			21	296
	Unison Res. Unico Secondo	1,200	Very good detail and coherence. Tonality is natural, imaging precise and deep, and dynamics are wide and unforced	6	opt			110	297
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Unison Res. Performance	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5				40	287

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £2,000									
	Croft Precision I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer			6		25	290
	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical					50	290
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2			266
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated			6		75	264
	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt	50	287
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling			5		136	256
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value			5		70	285
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1	1,198	A highly enjoyable pre/power combination with fine levels of detail, good rhythm, stable and precise imaging			2		50	297

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

RATING	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS		
				PREAMP INPUTS	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISF NUMBER
ABOVE £2,000						
	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	5 opt		273
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	5 opt		277
EC	Bryston BP26 DA2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	6 opt		100 278
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	6		300 249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	5		120 269
EC	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too	6 opt		400 293
	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	8	opt	80 276
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection			180 253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	5 opt		265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price			200 247
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	9 opt		125 250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it			700 234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	4		238
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition			140 208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	6		233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	7		128 256

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX759SE £550

If you're looking for an affordable multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is a top buy.



Arcam
DiVA AVR350 £1,500

Arcam's latest receiver offers a good helping of processing and connection options, with exceptionally musical sound.



Denon
AVC-A11XVA £2,500

A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing options, without sacrificing sound quality.



Classé
SSP-600/CA-5200 £11,900

Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel solution that's equally adept with music and movies should park their ears here.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited	7	100	284		
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640R	600	Simple and elegant receiver. Attributes that reflect in good sound quality without the distracting toys you'll find elsewhere	7	100	292		
EC	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o	11	140	273		
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously		170	266		
EC	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	10	140	267		
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmicky	3	160	255		
EC	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo. Cultured sound, too	5	110	270		
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements	10	150	260		
	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	7	100	273		
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	7	100	260		
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price	6	100	287		
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1	8	90	250		
	Arcam AWP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	8	135	275		
EC	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound	7	180	235		
EC	Classé SSP-600/ CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces	11	200	278		
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art	5	125	236		
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier	4		260		
EC	Linn Exotik + DA	3,245	Good analogue preamplifier with multichannel in/out up to 7.1 and a home cinema processor of quality combine to make a tempting package	8		291		
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6		230		
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering	5	50	238		
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen	11	250	243		
	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world	5	120	238		

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output. CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.



After 5 years in production, the Dino is still one of the most popular phono stages around. Highly versatile with accessible switches on the baseplate to facilitate a wide range cartridges.

'Never Connected' power supply technology virtually removes all incoming mains noise allowing only the music to be heard. Visit our website to learn more about this exciting product and the high performance Diablo phono stage.



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SPEAKER STAND
Nexus 10

INFORMATION

Atacama has always been known for offering customers outstanding value for money and the Nexus is no exception. The complete stand is manufactured from heavy gauge steel and the assembly is made using upgraded high tensile fixings to maintain optimum rigidity.

Pro-ject

CHECK ONLINE



USB TURNTABLE
Debut III

INFORMATION

This fantastic manual turntable is fitted with a OM 5E cartridge from Ortofon and integrated MM phono pre-amplifier with A/D converter and USB output. Nominal speeds 33 / 45 / 78 r.p.m. (78 optional), Equipped with internal phono pre-amp (MM), Digitalisation of analogue signals for recording direct to disk via USB with suitable recording programs.

TEAC

£ CALL NOW



REFERENCE
300DABMK3 SYSTEM
REF300DABMK3

INFORMATION

This unique reference system combines the A-H300MK3 Remote Amplifier, the T-H300DAB MK3 300 DAB Digital Tuner and the PD-H300 MK3 32-Track Music Memory CD Player to create a sensational arrangement.

> **Products, technology and irresistible prices**

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BUY NOW-PAY 2008

PRE-AMPLIFIER WITH POWER AMPLIFIER

The PRE30 employs a Class A coupled, discrete fully balanced circuit topology utilised for the best possible signal-to-noise ratio and audio fidelity. This combined with the A30.2 Dual Mono Power Amplifier produces music and movie sound as vibrantly as at the moment it was recorded.
PRE30/A30.2



Primare

CHECK ONLINE



7 CHANNEL AV RECEIVER

7 Channel A/V Receiver with HDMI Switching, Auto MCACC, 1080p playback and USB Host provides a quality AV system for your home. This system supports all the latest technology including Blu-Ray and HDTV formats.

VSX-917

Pioneer

5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
M-Cube 5.1

IKON AV SPEAKER PACKAGE
Ikon AV Speaker Package

HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
ELS1 5.1

5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM
Xeno

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE

COMING SOON



BUY NOW-PAY 2008

MISSION

INFORMATION

Mission's Stunning M-Cube consists of an active 250W subwoofer with 2x200mm (8") bass driver, magnetically shielded centre and satellite speakers and 5 Wall brackets



DALI

INFORMATION

This five star What HiFi award winning speaker package comprises of 2 Ikon 6 floor standing speakers, 1 Ikon Vokal 2 centre, 2 on wall rear speakers and the Dali Ikon subwoofer. All of which are also available individually with free QED speaker cable.



epos

INFORMATION

This speaker package integrates two pairs of ELS3 speakers, one ELS 3C centre channel and the powerful new ELS subwoofer in order to create this fantastic new system. These full range of high end, high quality Epos speakers are available either individually or as part of this 5.1 package.



MJ Acoustics

INFORMATION

This amazing new XENO system features High Grade crossover, ability to be fed with a full range signal, Bass driver technology, Tweeter employing soft dome technology and Boundary effect rear ports to enhance the refraction effects from the lower frequencies.

CHECK ONLINE FOR MORE PRODUCTS & PRICES

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the speaker specialists

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The Destiny integrated amplifier produces world beating audio performance with its use of discrete analogue MOS-FET, its new mains transformer which produces up to 100 Watts into 8 Ohm operation and its 3Hz - 80KHz Frequency Response

Destiny Series
Creek



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

The 8000P is a classic two channel power amplifier delivering over 100W per channel and featuring a frequency response of 0.1 Hz - 75 kHz.

8000P
Audiolab



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Integrated Amplifier with 75 watts per channel into 8 ohms, 200VA custom-made toroidal power transformer, power supply capacitors and separate pre-amp output with class A buffer stage.

2010s
Exposure



CONDITIONING UNIT

The GII Mini Sub & Vision was designed to be a very rewarding single box 'plug-n-play' solution for a complete audio or home theatre system. It features Polaris-X technology, dedicated earth post and 6 high quality individually filtered sockets which utilise filter circuits and cryogenic technology.

GII MiniSub
IsoTek

Quad



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AMAZING REDUCED SPEAKER PACKAGE

L-ITE AV PACKAGE

The L-ite system is conceived as a complete 5.1 speaker system capable of delivering outstanding performance from unbelievably small speakers. Finished to the same high standard as the rest of the L-series range of speakers, the system sold complete includes four satellite speakers, a dedicated centre channel and a 300Wrms 10" powered subwoofer.

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Sennheiser

CHECK ONLINE

HIGH-END TRAVEL HEADPHONE SET PXC-450



INFORMATION

The PXC-450 is a circumaural high-end travel headphone set with NoiseGard™ 2.0 technology, patented Duofol diaphragms and TalkThrough function for the best possible attenuation of ambient noise (as featured in the Bristol Show 2007).

Onkyo

£ CALL FOR PRICE

5.1-CHANNEL RECEIVER HT-S590



INFORMATION

The Onkyo HT-S590 is a first class receiver speaker package that is guaranteed to fulfil your home cinema pleasure with a combined 660 watts power output the unit is HDTV compatible and features a range of input and output devices including all the latest sound specifications.

Yamaha

CHECK ONLINE

DIGITAL PROJECTOR DPX-830



INFORMATION

The DPX-830 builds on the impressive accomplishments of Yamaha projectors and has the newest 0.65" WXGA (1,280 x 768 pixels) DLP device and imaging driver for superb resolution. The DPX-830 delivers an incredible 4,000:1 contrast, while brightness is 1,000 ANSI lumens (maximum).

InFocus

TEAC



MISSION



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WHY CHOOSE SEVENOAKS

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is the UK's largest specialist retailer of high-quality home entertainment solutions. With stores nationwide and a proud history of satisfied customers, Sevenoaks has a hard-earned reputation as the most comprehensive provider of home cinema, hi-fi and multi-room audio systems, offering excellence in customer service with a unique design and custom installation option available at many of its stores.

All Sevenoaks Stores:

- are staffed by experts in home cinema and hi-fi
- stock leading brands to offer a range of high quality products
- offer impartial and personal service
- have home cinema and hi-fi demonstration rooms

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HOME CINEMA PLASMA AND LCD TV



Pioneer KURO 42/50" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

Featuring Pioneer's new ultra black panel technology and an amazing contrast ratio of 16000:1, these 8th generation plasma screens produce ever deeper blacks than before. Visit your local store and see the difference.



Samsung LE32R87BD • 32" LCD TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

This HD ready 32" model features all the latest technology and is guaranteed to deliver an amazing home cinema experience into your home. Key features include a built-in digital tuner for Freeview channels, picture-in-picture, SRS TruSurround and a gaming mode.



Panasonic TH-37/42PX70

37/42" PLASMA TV HD READY FREEVIEW

Finished in a classy gloss black finish the PX70 screens will blend into any room. With a built-in Freeview tuner and excellent connectivity, they effortlessly handle motion and produce vibrant, natural colours. A choice of mounting options and screen sizes are available.

5

FIVE YEAR WARRANTY

included with all Plasma & LCD televisions purchased at our normal selling price*

*CHOOSE MODELS FROM Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer, Samsung, Sharp & Sony with a 26" screen or larger

*NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION. E.G.D. *SRP (SEVENOAKS RETAIL PRICE)



Sony Bravia KDL-40W2000

40" LCD TV • FULL HD READY • FREEVIEW

With a super wide viewing angle giving you a great picture from almost anywhere and a fast response time, this award-winning LCD TV includes a built-in Freeview tuner, 1920 x 1080 resolution and two HDMI inputs.

PACKAGE OFFERS

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*TV WARRANTY REVERTS TO MANUFACTURERS 1 YEAR PARTS AND LABOUR. MICROSOFT



Loewe Individual 32" LCD TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

With a choice of five different front colours and interchangeable side panels in nine different colours, these screens will match any decor. A wide range of mounting options are available.

PURCHASE THE AWARD-WINNING **ARCAM SOLO MOVIE 5.1 SYSTEM** with these selected KEF speaker packages and SAVE*

£2249 with KEF KHT2005.2	SAVE £350
£2599 with KEF KHT3005SE	SAVE £400
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*Not in conjunction with any other offer or promotion (NICWAD00)
Also Available: NEW SOLO MOVIE 2.1. Ask in-store for details



Getting the most from your home cinema

Home cinema has evolved from a simple projector-and-screen set-up to a state-of-the-art way of enjoying TV, DVD and multimedia. Sevenoaks knows the ins and outs of every component and will tailor a system to suit your exact requirements. Whether you're replacing an individual component or taking a first step into home cinema, expert advice is available.

DLP PROJECTION



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2007
PROJECTORS
BEST PROJECTOR VALUE
SIM2 HTM

Sim2 GRAND CINEMA HT380 1080P FULL HD READY

Sim2 Multimedia is a world-leading manufacturer at the forefront of home cinema technology and a name synonymous with high-end home cinema projection.

InFocus IN81/IN82 1080P FULL HD READY

Two outstanding projectors from InFocus. The IN81 produces a terrific picture with HD content while the IN82 has all the strengths of the IN81 but with an even better picture.



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2007
PROJECTORS OF THE YEAR
INFOCUS IN82

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2007
MULTIMEDIA RECEIVERS
BEST MULTIMEDIA RECEIVER
ONKYO TX-SR875

ONKYO AV RECEIVERS



TX-SR875 AV RECEIVER

Exceeding even the highest expectations, the TX-SR875 features on-board decoding for all the latest key sound formats.

TX-SR605 AV RECEIVER

"With a surfeit of talent, especially where movie sound is concerned, this is a must-hear unit"



HOME CINEMA SEPARATES AND SPEAKERS



Arcam DiVA

DV137 DVD PLAYER AVR280 AV RECEIVER

Delivering 80w across all of its 7 channels, Arcam's new AVR280 produces terrific sound with both movies and music. It is an ideal partner for Arcam's DV137 universal disc player. Compatible with DVD-Audio and SACD discs along with standard DVDs, the '137 impresses with its crisp, vivid images.



Denon

DVD1940 DVD PLAYER AVR2808 AV RECEIVER

Featuring 1080p upscaling, this award-winning DVD player provides first-class picture and sound quality and is also compatible with both MP3 and WMA audio discs. The New AVR2808 receiver features identical quality and power, 110 watts, for all 7 channels, HDMI inputs/outputs and auto set-up and room EQ.



Sony

RDR-HXD970 HDD/DVD RECORDER STR-DA5200ES AV RECEIVER

Building on the abilities of Sony's award-winning 'HXD860, this recorder features both analogue and digital tuners, an HDMI output, a 250GB hard disk plus a USB input. When partnered with the STR-DA5200ES 7 channel receiver the combination delivers excellent sound and vision performance.



Yamaha

DVD-S1700 DVD PLAYER RX-V1800 AV RECEIVER

Designed for top-notch sound quality, the new Yamaha RX-V1800 has 4 HDMI inputs and can decode HD audio formats. A host of impressive features hides behind its fascia. The multi-format DVD-S1700 disc player is an ideal partner, complementing the 'V1800 with both its looks and performance.

KEF KHT3005SE 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

This revised version of KEF's EISA award-winning KHT3005 backs-up its impressive looks with superb surround-sound. Powerful enough to fill even the largest of rooms, this SE version is a must audition speaker package.

"The new KHT3005SE is sensational"



Pioneer BDP-LX70A BLU-RAY DISC PLAYER

Enjoy outstanding high definition images with this award-winning Blu-ray disc player.



Claim FREE Accessories worth up to £300

when you purchase selected hi-fi, AV separates and speakers at our normal selling price (RRP). Choose from QED, Soundstyle, Grado and more. Ask in-store for details.

Don't forget! Accessories make the difference

The quality of sound and vision a system produces is determined as much by its accessories as its main components. At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought - our staff can demonstrate the difference the right accessories can make to your home entertainment experience.



B&W Mini Theatre MT-30 • 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

The Mini Theatre MT-30 delivers excellent performance and is ideal for both home cinema and hi-fi applications.

REL R Series SUBWOOFERS

The R-Series is designed to augment the performance of "full range" speaker systems and to provide linear response down to below 20Hz. The R series comprises the 205, 305 and 505. All models feature class D amplification and are available in a piano black lacquer finish.



PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please confirm before travelling. Any published prices were correct at time of going to press. Special or added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer or promotion (NICWADD).

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We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to the store manager's attention.

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Flexible finance options* are available on the majority of products we stock.

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Getting the most from your hi-fi system

Sevenoaks has 34 years' experience in the hi-fi market - and nobody knows more about getting the most from music. With the major brands in stock, Sevenoaks can help you choose individual components or design a complete system from scratch. Just tell our in-store experts what you listen to, when and where.

HI-FI SEPARATES AND SYSTEMS



Onkyo CR-515DAB CD RECEIVER

This award-winning CD system is a rare thing: a truly musical micro system. It delivers a great performance even when compared with budget hi-fi separates. (Excludes Speakers)

Teac

REFERENCE 300DAB MKIII MUSIC SYSTEM

Comprising three classy looking units, this CD player, DAB/FM/AM radio and amplifier system combines style with outstanding sound quality. Simply choose speakers from our extensive range in-store.



Arcam SOLO MUSIC SYSTEM Monitor Audio RS1 SPEAKERS

A great package coupling Arcam's award-winning all-in-one hi-fi system with the excellent RS1 speakers.

Ask in-store about our recommended cables and stands.



Monitor Audio

Across a speaker range rich in its choice of style, shape and application, Monitor Audio's thirty year heritage of technical expertise guarantees great sound with tonal accuracy that is shared by every speaker. From on-wall, in-wall, ceiling and floor, Monitor Audio gives you the freedom to enjoy high-quality sound in every room of your home.



Ranges include Bronze Reference, Silver RS, Gold Signature and Radius

Spendor S Series

Each Spendor 'S' series speaker delivers a balanced energy output to guarantee a consistent sound and a seamless sound stage in a diversity of living environments. Each model features:-

- Hand-made 'e' generation bass-midrange drive units
- Dynamically damped cabinets which reduce energy re-radiation to inaudible levels.



S8e

Designed for on-wall installations, the SR5 (above) delivers exceptional sound quality and is ideal for hi-fi and home cinema applications.

KEF iQ Series

From the second you spot the soft sheen of titanium on the main driver cones, you know you're in for something special. And you won't be disappointed.

Utilising KEF's trademark Uni-Q technology, the iQ series delivers consistently detailed imaging and unrivalled off-axis response so everyone in the room gets the full benefit, wherever they sit.



iQ5SE

"These SEs are far more entertaining than the originals, yet leave the old speakers' fuss-free nature in tact."

"A new class-leader: a true all-rounder"

MARANTZ CD6002 • WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • OCTOBER 2007



Marantz

Marantz products range from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and A/V receivers. Its hi-fi range includes the CD5001OSE and new CD6002 CD players and the PM4001OSE amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.

Rotel RA04 AMPLIFIER & RCD06 CD Bowers & Wilkins 685 SPEAKERS

Excellent performance and exceptional value for money. This combination creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.



Primare

With class-leading build quality, and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, Primare build elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.



Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price.

- High-definition audio and video performance
- Wide choice of both hi-fi and A/V components
- Uniquely broad upgrade options
- Luxuriously high quality of manufacture

NEW

Pro-ject

Revive your record collection with Pro-ject turntables. The range includes the new award-winning RPM1 Genie. This belt drive, two speed player comes complete with Ortofon cartridge and combines style with excellent sound quality.



MULTI-ROOM AUDIO



Sonos

This wireless, multi-room digital music system, lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house - and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

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just a small selection of our amazing autumn offers
Please note these offers are not in conjunction with any other or promotion (NICWA00)

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UP TO
£300

Claim free accessories worth up to £300

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£250 - £499	£50 FREE
£500 - £999	£100 FREE
£1000 - £1499	£200 FREE
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SAVE
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Create your own system and SAVE 15% with our HI-FI system builder*

CHOOSE CD + Amplifier + Speakers
ADD their selling prices (RRP) together
DEDUCT 15% from the total

*Includes most, but not all, brands. Contact your local store for details (NICWA00)

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Create your own system and SAVE 15% with our A/V system builder*

CHOOSE DVD + AV Amplifier + Speakers
ADD their selling prices (RRP) together
DEDUCT 15% from the total

*Includes most, but not all, brands. Contact your local store for details (NICWA00)

SAVE
10%

10% off RRP when you purchase selected hi-fi amps, CD players and tuners*

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SAVE
15%

15% off RRP when you purchase selected A/V amps, receivers and DVD players*

*Includes most, but not all, brands. Contact your local store for details (NICWA00)

SAVE
UP TO
20%

Up to 20% off RRP when you purchase selected Hi-Fi and A/V speakers*

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CLAIM
£200

Claim £200 towards the projection screen of your choice with selected Sim2 and InFocus projectors

When purchased at our normal selling price (RRP). Ask in-store for details (NICWA00)

5 YEAR
WARRANTY

Five year warranty included with all plasma and LCD TVs when purchased at our normal selling price*

Includes Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer, Samsung, Sharp and Sony with a 26 inch screen or larger. *SRP (Sevenoaks Retail Price). (NICWA00)



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BRIGHTON (HOVE) 57 Western Rd 01273 733338	NOTTINGHAM (SHERWOOD) 597-599 Mansfield Rd 0115 911 2121
BRISTOL 92b Whiteladies Rd, Clifton 0117 974 3727	OXFORD 41 St Clements St 01865 241773
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EPSOM 12 Upper High St 01372 720720	SOUTHAMPTON 33 London Rd 023 8033 7770
EXETER 28 Cowick St 01392 218895	SOUTHGATE 77 Chase Side 020 8886 2777
GLASGOW 88 Great Western Rd 0141 332 9655	STAINES 4 Thames St 01784 460777
GUILDFORD 73b North St 01483 536666	SWINDON 8-9 Commercial Rd 01793 610992
HOLBORN 144-148 Grays Inn Rd 020 7837 7540	SWISS COTTAGE 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd 020 7722 9777
HULL 1 Savile Row, Savile St 01482 587171	TUNBRIDGE WELLS 28-30 St Johns Rd 01892 531543
KINGSTON 43 Fife Rd 020 8547 0717	WATFORD 478 St Albans Rd 01923 213533
LEEDS 62 North St 0113 245 2775	WEYBRIDGE 43 Church St, The Quadrant 01932 828525
LEICESTER 10 Loseby Lane 0116 253 6567	WITHAM (ESSEX) 1 The Grove Centre 01376 501733
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FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS*

Spread the cost of your buying. Flexible finance options* are available on the majority of products we stock. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Tannoy
Mercury F4 £350
Tannoy's Mercury speakers have a long history of 'quality' sound at low prices, and the latest range is no exception – this floorstander is thoroughly engaging.



DALI
Ikon 6 £899
Complete with a ribbon super-tweeter, this is an exceptionally capable floorstander for the money, delivering a highly detailed and truly engrossing sound.



B&W
805S £1,600
A superbly well-engineered standmount that's capable of delivering magnificent musical communication, alongside superior subtlety and delicacy.



Mordaunt-Short
Performance 6 £3,500
This extraordinary speaker stands at the pinnacle of Mordaunt-Short's current range. State of the art resolution and imaging are among its many attributes.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SP. CL.	CLOSE TO WALL	SPEAKER NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26	A+	50				277
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	370	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	A	24				294
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39	A	22				292
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5	A-	45				283
<input type="checkbox"/>	ALR Jordan Entry L	500	Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency	20,86,29	A	23				279
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,350	Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount	24,5,37,31,5	A	26				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC SCM11	849	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with good, natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much	21,38,25	A-	55				293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aurousal A1	450	Single-driver system is coloured but wonderfully coherent and very effective at communicating emotions	20,5,36,27	A	40				299
<input type="checkbox"/>	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65				260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23				226
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	A-	40				279
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 683	899	We have not come across this level of transparency in a sub-£1,000 speaker before, killer bass is sublime	19,8,98,5,34	A	38				297
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35				253
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	A	37				271
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	A+	22				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24	A	40				296
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio DM 2/10	775	Unfashionably bulky standmount has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is delicate and well mannered	27,5,45,35	A	22				299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	A-	28				273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40				269
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40				265
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	A-	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,000	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5	A+	20				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	A	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF iQ3	280	Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33	A+	40				284
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	A	25				273
	Mission élan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacey, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34	A+	48				298
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	A+	28				271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30				294
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio BR5	400	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold sounding, good value and an easy electrical load	17,85,25	A-	36				293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which takes up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27	A-	40				284
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	A	33				276
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	16,5,85,29,5	A	40				281

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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Divine Audio
Market Harborough, Leicestershire
01858 432999

Doug Brady Hi-fi
Warrington, Cheshire
01925 828009

Loud & Clear
Bonnington Mill, Edinburgh
0131 556 3963

Loud & Clear
Finneston, Glasgow
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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (cm)	FLOOR/STANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24	A	50			261
	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line stand-mount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30	A	28			275
	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23	A+	40			267
	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19,5	A	48			286
	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30	A+	28			284
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26	A-	30			292
	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24	A	50			269
	Rega R3	448	Discreet, pretty and fine value. A little lightweight but impressively open, it delivers music with great agility	20,76,28	A	40			265
	Revel Concerta F12	900	Massive multi-driver floorstander is not pretty, but has great headroom, bass weight and impressive neutrality	25,108,36	A	22			296
	Ruark Sabre III	799	Straightforward engineering combined with high finish quality that delivers a beautifully timed and engaging sound	20,33,5,27	A-	50			289
	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,97,29	A+	24			294
	Totem Rainmaker	795	Standmount has a big sound, with a smooth midband and bright top. Could have more punch and warmth	17,35,5,23	A	25			291
	Triangle Antal Esw	995	Smoother than its predecessors, with a beautifully balanced bass and midband, though the top end is uneven	20,108,34	A	20			288
	Triangle Titus ES	370	Not pretty but busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	18,37,30	A-	40			269
	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34	A	40			265
ABOVE £1,000									
	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26	A+	40			281
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,900	Luxury miniature has a laid back but bouncy sound, fine dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25	A-	30			281
	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,200	Slim, laid back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range	17,99,26	A	28			275
	ATC SCM16A	2,203	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Good value, including built-in amps, and fuss-free	27,45,33	ACT	42			300
	ATC SCM19	1,499	Super linear motor system, heavy weight construction and fabulous veneer that makes the ATC a pro favourite	22,44,31,5	A-	54			285
	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22	A+	27			271
	AVI Duo	1,299	Sophisticated floorstander, a natural partner for AVI's electronics. Unusually clean and honest musical presentation	19,77,28	A	50			280
	B&W 802D	8,000	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication. Makes sweet music	37,115,56	A	<20			267
	B&W 805S	1,600	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back but otherwise a real delight	24,39,33	A	25			271
	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36	A-	20			260
	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46	A	20			264
	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5	A-	<20			281
	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26	A	45			277
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,104,37,5	A	45			287
	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28,115,38	A	28			290
	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	A-	25			276
	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	A+	30			255
	Focal Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	A-	20			248
	Gamut L5	5,900	Impressive build and sophisticated driver design make the L5 a stunning speaker with rare transparency levels	20,116,43	A-	32			271
	Jamo Reference R909	7,500	Top model (in a class of one) is open, full and easy on the ear, and surely a classic in the making	48,127,54	A-	25			280
	KEF Reference Model 2012	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way stand-mount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25x42x41	A	30			298
	Krell Resolution 2	6,497	Large but good looking, with Sonus Faber type elasticated front. Musically a great full bandwidth all-rounder	122,29,61	B	28			273
	Meridian M3100	1,850	Attractive and capable active (125w) with great imaging and strong bass. High neutrality and good power handling	19,39,25	ACT	45		opt	280
	Opera Seconda	1,295	Classy cabinetwork plus beautifully judged neutrality with crisp, clean and deep bass	24,102,5,31,5	A-	20			297

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICESTEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxDxH) (CM)	FLOORSTANDING?	TYPE OF DRIVE	FRONT (Hz)	REAR SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range	27,110,25	A-	<20				281
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride	24,121,37	A-	35				264
	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18	A	25				267
	Neat Motive 1	1,200	Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative	16,92,5,20	A-	20				276
	Neat Momentum 3i	1,745	Classy isobaric standmount sounds surprisingly big, with exceptional coherence and impressive dynamic range	22,38,27	A-	25				299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33,5,57,5,10	A+	45				285
	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	A	20				260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PMC EB1	5,950	The best argument for large speakers that we've heard in a long time	29,120,46,5	A-	19				292
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	A+	20				254
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38,5	A-	45				294
	Rega R7	1,498	Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character	27,98,35	A	25				271
	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	A	20				256
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	A	30				265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	A-	48				274
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,000	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer and richer	20,100,25	A	22				290
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	A	22				259
	Sonus Faber Concerto D.	1,799	The Concerto Domus performs significantly above its price level, especially with acoustic material	21,99,31	A	35				270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sonus Faber Grand Piano D.	2,498	The Grand Piano Domus has a fabulous physical appearance and delivers a clean, refined sound	21,106,31	A-	32				283
	Tannoy Glenair 10	2,999	With a 250mm dual concentric driver this is a generously proportioned, highly engaging speaker for a good price	36,100,35	A+	38				295
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	A	35				277
	Triangle Celius Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	A	22				277
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Magellan Concerto	14,750	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it's easier to live with and remains highly entertaining	60,160,45	A-	32				290
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65	A	20				270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	A-	40				261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wharfedale Airedale Neo	9,000	Expansive yet relaxed sounding, the Neo is a coloured but surprisingly musical and enjoyable speaker	52,115,45	A-	25				296
	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted stand-mount with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving	22,38,35	A	28				296

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27		241
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20		251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28		241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38		262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		210
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20		268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29		269

SPECS KEY EASE OF DRIVE How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (HZ)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	45,33,45	1,000	10	290

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.

BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam AVA2100 AV Receiver, Denon AVR1300 AV Receiver, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam DVA AVR250 AV Receiver, Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam DVA D78 DVD Player, Arcam FMJ D33 CD Player, and various speakers.

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Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Denon AVR1306 AV Receiver, In Focus N72 DLP Projector, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Loewe AV2000 Sub Woofer, Loewe VR2000 Sub Woofer, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Audiolab 8000S Amplifier, Audiolab 8000P Pre Amplifier, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Denon AVR1306 AV Receiver, Fujitsu P42HX40GS Plasma Display, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Acoustic Energy Active Centre Speaker, Acoustic Energy Active Surround, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Musical Fidelity KW250S System, Musical Fidelity KW250S System, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam FMJ P1 MusicBox Amplifier, Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam DVA D78 DVD Player, Arcam FMJ D33 CD Player, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam FMJ G31 Pre Amplifier, Arcam FMJ D33 CD Player, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Pioneer VSXA100A S AV Receiver, Pioneer VSXA100A S AV Receiver, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver, Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Pioneer VSXA100A S AV Receiver, Pioneer VSXA100A S AV Receiver, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver, Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver, and various speakers.

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Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Arcam AV2100 AV Receiver, Arcam DVA D78 DVD Player, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Denon DVD1930 DVD Player, Denon DVD1930 DVD Player, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Marantz CD50010SE CD Player, Marantz CD50010SE CD Player, and various speakers.

Table listing audio equipment with prices. Includes items like Pioneer VSXA220 AV Receiver, Pioneer VSXA220 AV Receiver, and various speakers.

HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being

best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not

quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270		230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270		244
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250		245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT1770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290		287
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT880	200	Informative, neutral and surprisingly close to good loudspeakers. Good for occasional and long-term listening alike						205		300
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR225	180	Tonally shows the way to Grado's amazing GS1000 flagship, but detail and soundstage are not truly class-leading						200		300
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200		270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250		288
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution						35		290
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD485	65	A great all-round headphone for occasional or even heavy use, refined in sound and comfortable, too						220		296
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270		266
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience						260		252
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shure SE420	240	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears with real refinement						15		295
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20		285
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280		268
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						205		295

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

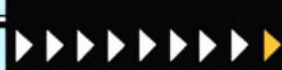
Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Questor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine					295
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A lively and detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm. Slight added upper-bass warmth does little to detract					297
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit					293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass and excellently neutral and detailed midrange: treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction					299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise					270
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price, especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness					296
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha	50	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too					295
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!					279
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generically – notably resolution, focus and articulation					294
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere					284
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral					278
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profigold PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good					299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Sword-ISL	379	Unusual inductance-free design, beautifully built, with bold, finely detailed and outgoing sound quality and excellent discipline					292
<input type="checkbox"/>	TCl Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass					285
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vanden Hul MC Silver IT MkIII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price					289
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price					273
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value					£ 289
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble					£ 278
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price					£ 260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price					£ 265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance					£ 279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Hyper 1.5	10	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but its performance at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Ascent 2.0	55	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board					294
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Epic Twin	40	Good all rounder, which generally sounds relaxed and musical, and a full bass that stops the right side of sounding blowsy					287
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8PR	12	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through. Excellent value					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board					227
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble					280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, hi-res and suitable for exacting systems					278
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging – a budget bargain					276
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems					234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical					287
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round					241
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times					291
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 16/4	5	Budget biwire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail					292

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46			5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50			4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45			4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37			4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless	65	60,42			4	Glass	293
	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57,41			5	Glass	263
	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40			4	Metal	247
	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44			4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot	75	45,36			5	Glass	261
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5			4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49			4	Torlyte	240
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40			5	Glass	217
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50			4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER	
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50	20,17			1		293
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16,5,18			1		281
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16,5			2		299
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16,3			4		283
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4		232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15			5		261
	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22			6		287
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3		280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.



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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp) Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire) Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to the harmonic elaborations of some detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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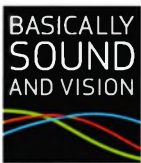
  

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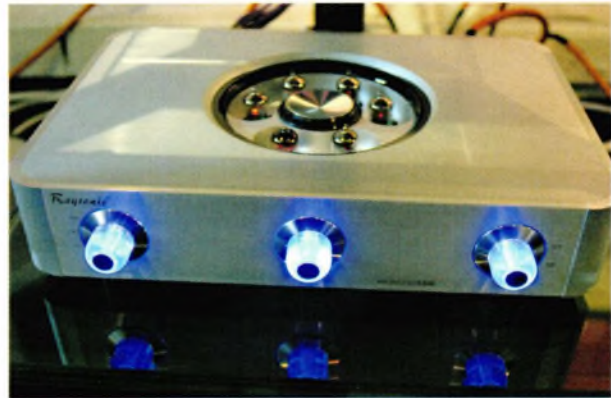
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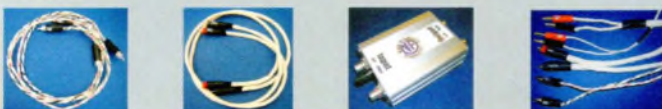
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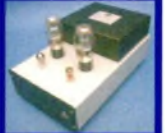
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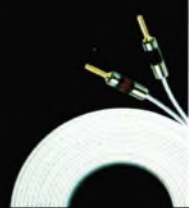
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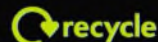
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2nd-hand shootout

£500 buys a lot of turntable, if you follow our expert's advice

By the lofty standards of some, £500 may not sound like a lot with which to buy a second-hand turntable. It is, however, quite enough to access a huge variety of decks from all eras.

If you want to go truly retro, then it's hard to beat the Garrard 301/401. Launched in 1954, the 301 was the first transcription turntable that was able to play all three speeds (78rpm, 45rpm and 33.3rpm) on one chassis – hence the name. Constant enhancements, such as an oil bearing instead of grease, kept the 301 fresh. In 1965 a complete overhaul resulted in the 401. Sadly, the last 401s weren't quite so well finished, and by 1977 modern decks such as the popular Linn LP12 meant that the 401 was old news.

Although extremely solid, rumble can be a problem with these wheel-driven turntables. More often than not, the noise is likely to come from the eddy current braking system rather than the rubber-edged idler wheel. The problem is that at normal (45/33.3rpm) speeds, the brake is still half applied! There are upgrades that can easily eradicate this problem, and firms such as Loricraft or Martin Bastin, will easily be able to help silence your 301/401 – in a good way!

For £500, our pick would be an early 401. Identifiable by its grey chassis, it would ideally be fitted to a contemporary plinth such as the ones made by Loricraft, Martin Bastin or Slate Audio. For rock solid dynamics and impressive bass extension, a sorted Garrard still has the power to impress.

At this point the predictable deck to move on to would be the Linn LP12. As it's already been covered many times within these pages, though, we're going to take a look at a deck

that's both similar yet different.

In the late 1980s, a Linn LP12 would set you back around £500. For £900 you could buy the now largely forgotten Ariston RD90 Superior. As the suspended suspension system used by the LP12 was actually pioneered by Ariston, the chassis of this turntable will look very familiar to Linn owners. Where the Ariston scores over the Linn is in the sheer weight of construction. The brass armboard is a work of art and, at around five kilograms, the damped platter weighs more than some complete turntables. Using an electronic speed control and separate power supply, the RD90 Superior was, well, superior to the LP12 of the time. Speeds of 45rpm and 33.3rpm are available, with added speed and pitch controls. In comparison to more modern decks, the Ariston can sound a little plodding, but compensates with an extended and rock-solid bass. Match to a lively sounding cartridge and the RD90 Superior sounds great and, dare we say it, better than

“Match to a lively cartridge and the RD90 sounds, dare we say it, better than a LP12.”

a standard LP12 of its time. Generally unknown, this superbly built turntable rarely goes wrong and can be had with a basic SME or Rega arm for between £300-£500.

Our final two decks are very much products of the vinyl resurgence. Launched in 1999, the acrylic plinthed Pro-Ject Perspective may not look original, but it's modern and relatively funky. With its twin motors for 33.3rpm and 45rpm speeds, a decent Pro-Ject 9 tonearm and record clamp, the Perspective gives

excellent timing and control, if not quite the weight of the Garrard or

Ariston. This is another reliable turntable and, with all parts still available, very easy to service too. £500 should be enough to buy a relatively recent model and most probably one with a decent Ortofon cartridge fitted – by far the most popular cartridge sold with the deck at the time. Should you wish to upgrade at a later date, then there's the £300 Speedbox SE power supply and the £400



Above: Roksan Radius turntable

9cc tonearm with carbon fibre armtube.

The Roksan Radius is the most recent deck here. Although only launched in late 2003, its original £750/£850 price tag makes it easily available at our budget. The difference in price reflects the two different finishes available. Although the more expensive of the two, the acrylic plinth is worth the extra over the maple-veneered version – it sounds slightly more transparent and less congested. The deck comes fitted with the capable Nima tonearm as standard, although Roksan's upgradeable Tabriz or

Artemiz arms are also an option. Being so recent, parts are not an issue and neither should reliability. The only slight annoyance with the Radius is that the power switch can 'thump' through the speakers. Fortunately, Roksan are able to fit suppression capacitors, although you will need to take it to a dealer for the work to be carried out. One of the most cost-effective upgrades for the Radius is the improved belt. It's made from the same material as that used by the pricey TMS, and improves focus and imaging in particular.

If it's the safe option you're after, either the Pro-Ject or Roksan will make excellent buys. Both turntables are also easy and relatively cheap to upgrade to a high spec. Yet, provided you don't mind something older, and inherently riskier, the Garrard or Ariston will offer the sort of rock solid control that eludes these newer designs. Either way, we doubt any of these decks would disappoint for £500. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month: £1,500 CD players



Above: Ariston RD90 Superior turntable

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SME Series V gold printed tone arm, boxed/mint (£2045) only	£1195
My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new)	£2750
Blue Pearl turntable with Graham Phantom arm	£90A
Selection of new MC cartridges at special prices, please call.	

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villetti speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.

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ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items		
Acuphase DD90 / DC91	£4000	£20000
SME Model 10 turntable - boxed - nice	£1800	£2700
Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace with LV mat - 15 months old - perfect	£1400	£2450
Teac P30 CD specific transport - scarce and very good	£1500	
Tube Technology Unisis Signature Integrated - 30 hours use	£1000	£2500
Schroeder DPS 9" tonearm - Bocote wood - hens' teeth	£2000	£3000
Jan Allaerts Finish - light use	£1500	£4000
VDH Various MC cartridges - Frogs, Grasshoppers, Colibris. 10 - 150 hrs use		Please call
Jorma Prime Interconnect 1m XLR - XLR	£1000	£3200
Jorma Prime Interconnect 2m XLR - XLR	£1400	£4200
Hovland HP100 pre-amplifier - factory updated - loved and spotless	£2900	
Kuzma Airline tonearm - Kondo silver internal and external lead - ouch	£3500	£7500
Kuzma Stogi 'S' unipivot tonearm - new - lovely sound - giveaway	£350	£650
Rogue Audio Zeus stereo power amplifier - very big and very heavy	£3000	£7500
Canary 300B monos - 10 watts - excellent condition - giveaway	£800	
Canary 303 monos - 22 watts 300B power with Living Voice upgrade	£3500	£7500
Croft Twinstar IV Power amplifier	£2500	£4500
Croft Epac Pre-amplifier with built in phono	£1000	£2000
Unison Research Smart 300B class A monos - 12 months use - giveaway	£1800	£4500
Lavardin PE Reference line pre-amplifier - 1 lady driver - perfect	£1500	£2400
Lavardin AP power amplifier - spotless as above	£2100	£3400
Exposure 3010 CD player - as new - boxed - 100 hours use	£850	£1400
Audio Aero Capitole CD24 / 192 - factory serviced - vgc	£1700	£4000
Audionet Art V2 CD player - perfect, as new - 6 months old	£1500	£2500
Audionet Art V2 CD player - perfect, as new - 18 months old	£1300	£2500
Audionet SAM integrated amplifier - perfect, as new - 6 months old	£1500	£2500
Art Audio Concerto integrated amplifier - black & chrome	£1900	£4000
Esoteric X03 CD player - perfect - boxed - 200 hours max use	£3750	£5000
Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 months old	£700	£1600
Cardas Golden Reference speaker cable - 3m single set - very light use	£1250	£2250
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electrics	£1900	
Monarchy Audio SM70 Pro - solid state class A power amp - nice sound	£300	
Art Audio Argento 300B PSE integrated 18w amplifier black & chrome	£5500	£8000
Sugden A21 amplifier - class A - solid state	£500	£950
B&W Nautilus 804 floorstanders - vgc - cherry	£1700	£2700
Canary 608 with LV upgrades and Border Patrol PSU	£2000	£4000
Vitavox S2 pressure drivers - various vintages	POA	
EAR S34 50W EL34 / EAR 864	£2750	£4800
ProAc Response I) loudspeakers - yew	£700	£1400
Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - santos rosewood	£800	£2000
Rega Jupiter cd player - professionally clocked + rebuilt with Blackgate cap's	£600	
Rega Jura floorstander loudspeakers - cherry	£450	

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VINYL

GRAHAM 2.2 TONEARM	BRAND NEW	£1495
GRAHAM 2 TONEARM	MINT/BOXED	£995
HELIUS CYALINE TONEARM	EXCLT	£495
NVA TWO BOX MC PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£395
GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD & ELEVATOR	MINT	£675
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO STAGE 2-BOX	EX.DEM	£299
MEIXING MING DA MC767 RD MM/MC PHONO STAGE	MINT/BOXED	£299
BILL BEARD MM/MC PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£375
McCORMACK MINI PHONO DRIVE	EX.DEM	£349
ASR MINI BASIS PHONO STAGE	NEW/BOXED	£495
FORSSELL AIR FORCE REFERENCE	BOXED	£6995
ORACLE DELPHI V (£4000)	NEW/DIS	£2995
ACCOUSTIC SIGNATURE SAMBA MK II & ARM	NEW	£1595
TRANSCRIPTORS & SKELETAL ARM	EXCLT	£1750
LINN LP12/VAL/BLACK ITTOCK LVII	EXCLT	£750
LINN LP12/VAL/CIRKUS/ITTOCK LV11	MINT/BOXED	£850
LINN LP12/VALLHALLA/BASIK	GC	£495

TRANSPORTS/DACS/CD

DCS P-81 SACD/CD/VOLUME (8 WEEKS OLD) £7000	ASNEW	£3995
McKINTOSH MCD-201 SACD/CD/VOLUME	NEW/BOXED	£2995
EINSTEIN THE CD PLAYER	EXCLT	£1500
PROCEED (L EVINSON) PD1-1 TRANSPORT & DAC	MINT/BOXED	£895
CONSONANCE LINEAR CD PLAYER	NEW/BOXED	£650
PERPETUAL TECH. P1-A/P3-A/P3B MOD/WRIGHT SIG-2	BRAND NEW	£1995
PEERPERPETUAL TECHNOLOGIES P-3A 24/96 DAC	BRAND NEW	£995
LECTOR DIGIDRIVE-TL TRANSPORT& PSU	MINT/BOXED	£1295
ACUPHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT	EXCLT	£2750
THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT	MINT/BOXED	£1295
THETA DATA II TRANSPORT (SILVER)	MINT/BOXED	£795
THETA DATA TRANSPORT	VGC	£495
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDS III CD/TRANSPORT	N.O.S.	£395
MSB LINK DAC 24/96kHz MODULE	MINT/BOXED	£375
Z SYSTEMS Z-3src UPSAMPLER (£1450 NEW)	MINT/BOXED	£450
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.III HDCC DAC	N.O.S.	£350
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V1.2 HDCC DAC	N.O.S.	£275
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V1.1 HDCC DAC	N.O.S.	£250
MARANTZ CD63 KI-SIG MKII	MINT/BOXED	£295
DENON 2800 MKII GOLD (HDCC)	MINT/BOXED	£299
PRIMARE V-25 CD/DVD PLAYER (£1000 NEW)	NEW/BOXED	£475
ARCAM CD 82 (72 UPGRADE)	MINT/BOXED	£295

SOLID STATE

MUSICAL FIDELITY AS INTEGRATED	BRAND NEW	£1195
ROTEL RB-1092 500 WATT X 2	MINT/BOXED	£795
ORELLE EVO-100 CD PLAYER/PRE AMP/POWER AMP (£3.5K)	MINT/BOXED	£1795
XTC PRE-1 POWER-LAMPS GLOSS BLACK	MINT/BOXED	£1795
ATC SCA-2 PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£1795
ATC CA-2 PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£495
MUSIC FIRST PASSIVE MAGNETIC (SILVER WIRED £2750)	DISPLAY	£2250
MUSIC FIRST PASSIVE MAGNETIC (COPPER WIRED £1600)	DISPLAY	£1295
ADVANTAGE 1200 INTEGRATED AMP	EXCLT/BOXED	£995
MARANTZ PM66 KI-SIG AMP	MINT/BOXED	£275
ALCHEMIST FORSETTI PRE & POWER AMPS	MINT/BOXED	£1595
KRELL KMA-100 MONOBLOCS (3 YEARS USE)	MINT/BOXED	£2750
AUDIO RESEARCH LS-3B PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£995
KRELL FPB-200 POWER AMP	EXCLT	£2750
JEFF ROWLAND MC-6 (£16000?)	MINT	£3995
NORTH AMERICAN PRODUCTS H-CAT PRE AMP (£2850)	EX.DEM	£1475
MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-208 RECEIVER (SUPERB)	MINT/BOXED	£1795
McCORMACK RLD-1 REMOTE PRE & DNA-125 POWER AMPS	MINT/BOXED	£2250
LUXMAN M-1DS DUJII MONO CLASS A POWER AMP	MINT/BOXED	£1795
PLINIUS SB-300 (RETAIL £4650)	EX.DEM/DIS	£2995
PLINIUS SA-201 (RETAIL £3600)	EX.DIS	£2395
CONRAD JOHNSON PF-1 PRE & PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£895
BEL CANTO PRE-1 PREAMP & EVO 200.2 POWER AMP	SALE!!	£2295
SONY TAE9000-ES PRE & TAN9-ES POWER AMPS	SALE!!	£1250
CONRAD JOHNSON PFR/PF/MF-2500A POWER AMPS	MINT/BOXED	£3450

LOUDSPEAKERS

APOGEE DUETTA SIGNATURES	EXCLT	£1650
APOGEE CALIPERS	NICE	£850
MONITOR AUDIO GOLD STANDARD 10 & STANDS	MINT	£595
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE (£1250)	EX.DIS	£795
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 2SE	EX.DIS	£695
AURUM CANTUS BLACK ORCHID (£1200)	EX.DIS	£795
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE (£1250)	EX.DIS	£795
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 2SE	EX.DIS	£695
AURUM CANTUS BLACK ORCHID (£1200)	EX.DIS	£795
BKS 128 RIBBON HYBRID (STAR GRANITE)	MINT/BOXED	£1395
AURUM CANTUS SUPREME (AWESOME! £10,000)	BRAND NEW	£6995
EGGLESTONWORKS ANDRA II	NEW	£995
EGGLESTONWORKS ROSA	NEW	£4795
EGGLESTONWORKS FONTAINE II	EX.DEM	£2495
MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO 50 (ROSEWOOD) £4400	MINT/BOXED	£1250
A.L.R. JORDAN NOTE 5 FLOORSTANDERS (£2500)	EX.DEM	£1195
CURA CA-30 FLOORSTANDERS (MAPLE)	MINT	£995
AUDIO PHYSIC CALDERA II (10K NEW?)	MINT/BOXED	£2995
TANNOY GRF MEMORY T.W.	MINT	£3750
CELESTION A-3	MINT/BOXED	£1250
CELESTION A-2 SANTOS R/WOOD	BRAND NEW	£995
MARTEN MILES II CHERRY (8k+ NEW)	EXCLT/BOXED	£3750
MIRAGE M1si BI POLAR LOUDSPEAKERS	EXCELLENT	£2750
FAB AUDIO MODEL-ONE (RETAIL £7500)	EX.DEM	£4750
FAB AUDIO BRAT (£700)	EX.DISPLAY	£395
AURUM CANTUS VOLLA (RETAIL £2500)	EX.DISPLAY	£1750

VALVE AMPS

ROGUE AUDIO METIS PRE AMP (REMOTE)	EX.DEM	£695
UNISON RESEARCH FEATHER PRE/35 POWER	MINT/BOXED	£1495
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9	MINT/BOXED	£995
TUBE TECHNOLOGY SYNERGY INT.AMP	MINT	£2999
GAMMA REF. 211 MONOBLOCS	EXCLT	£1295
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9 PRE AMP/PHONO STAGE	MINT/BOXED	£995
ROGUE AUDIO G6 MAGNUM REMOTE PREAMP	MINT/BOXED	£1195
AUDIO RESEARCH VT-200 POWER AMP	EXCLT	£4450

MAINS CABLES/BLOCKS/CONDITIONERS ETC

TARA LABS RSC AIR2 6FT POWER CORDS	BRAND NEW	£199
BLACK RHODIUM SUPER MAINS POWER CORDS	BRAND NEW	£65
BLACK RHODIUM POWER CORD RHODIUM PLATED EASYGRIP PLUG	BRAND NEW	£95

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Ex - demo and second hand items

Digital	Was	Now	Loudspeakers		
47 labs Dumpty S/H	1425	899	JM lab Alto Utopia be Signature S/H	11399	6499
47 Labs Flatfish MKII Transport S/H	3020	1995	JM Lab Micro Utopia be Classic x-demo	4700	3750
dCS Delius 1394 DAC x-demo	6499	2999	Martin Logan Aeon I Oak x-demo	3189	1999
dCS Verdi Encore Transport BNIB	9500	5999	Martin Logan Clarity Cherry x-demo	2500	1895
Krell Showcase DVD x-demo	3698	2775	Martin Logan Fresco x-demo	850	635
Krell SACD Standard 5 2 x-demo	3998	2999	Martin Logan Grotto Subwoofer x-demo	999	749
Linn Numerik DAC S/H	1500	449	Monitor Audio Radius 360 Subwoofer Cherry S/H	350	249
Nagra DAC x-demo	7250	3999	ProAc D25 Maple Floorstanders S/H	2700	1599
Naim Audio CD3 S/H	N/A	299	Pen Audio Charm Active Subwoofer x-demo	1995	999
Orelle CD100EVO S/H	1500	975	Pen Audio Rebel 2 x-demo	995	699
Pathos Endorphine CD Player x-demo	4500	3375	Rel Acoustics Studio III Subwoofer x-demo	4500	2995
Rega Saturn x-demo	1296	975	Sonus faber Concertino Domus inc Stands x-demo	1136	849
Rotel RDC 865 CD Player S/H	N/A	99	Sonus faber Concerto Domus x-demo	1799	1350
Sugden CD21SE CD Player S/H	1499	1099	Sonus faber Gran Piano domus x-demo	2498	1875
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1299	Sonus faber wall domus x-demo	787	590
Theta pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	695	Sonus faber Centre domus inc stand x-demo	986	739
Wadia 270/271X Transport & DAC x-demo	16000	9499	Sonus faber Gravis Domus subwoofer x-demo	1290	959
			Sonus faber Cremona Maple x-demo	5000	3999
			Spendor S3 Cherry S/H	599	379
			Tsunami TS300 Beech Subwoofer S/H	299	169
			Wilson Audio System5 Black S/H	18000	5999
Analogue			Cables and Accessories		
Heed Audio Orbit TT PSU New & Boxed	225	179	Audioquest 1.5m Topaz RCA-RCA S/H	N/A	99
Benz Micro Refill Silver MC Cartridge S/H	1500	749	Cardas Cross 2M RCA-RCA S/H	590	399
Clearaudio Signature MC x-demo	1500	699	Cogan Hall Intermezzo EMD 0 75m RCA S/H	N/A	99
Kuzma Stabi/Stogi S Turntable New & Boxed	N/A	1399	Madrigal MDC2 1m RCA/RCA 75ohm Digital Cable new boxed	420	249
Mc Cormack Micro Drive Phono Stage S/H	650	399	Nordost Baldur 5m pair bi wired Speaker cable x-demo	1265	999
Phonomena BPS Battery supply for phono BINB	650	399	Nordost Frey 1m RCA Interconnect x-demo	550	449
Phonomena Photo stage MM/MC BINB	650	399	Nordost Valhalla 1m Balanced AES/EBU Digital x-demo	1480	899
Rega P5/Elys x-demo	772	579	Nordost Valhalla 1m Balanced Interconnect S/H	2195	1150
Rega P7 x-demo	1298	975	Spectral MH-750 8ft Speaker cable S/H	900	399
Rega P2/Bias Turntable S/H	270	179	Spectral MI=330 15ft interconnect S/H	1257	599
Roksan Xerxes X with XX bearing & plinth x-demo	1795	1325	Vdh CD102 MkIII 2m S/H	199	99
Sugden Stage 2 MM/MC phono stage x-demo	399	299			
Tesseract Taada MM/MC Phono stage S/H	N/A	499	Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies		
Vdh Grasshopper GLAII MC Cartridge x-demo	2500	1699	Arcam Delta 80 LW/MW/FM preset Tuner S/H	399	169
Vdh MCOne Special BNIB	950	649	Symbol CDAB Tuners S/H	1200	599
Vdh The Frog special L.O version BNIB	1700	1199	Isotek Sigmas x-demo	995	749
VPI HR-X Turntable x-demo	9250	6999	Isotek Substation special version S/H	1600	695
			Magnum Dynlab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	395	199
			PS Audio PS300 with multiwave S/H	1750	799
			Rotel RT850L AM/FM Tuner S/H	189	99
Preamplifiers					
Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamplifier X-demo	625	399			
Audio Research SP16 with Phono Stage x-demo	2249	1749			
Conrad Johnson Premier 18LS x-demo	4000	1999			
Convergent Audio CAT SL1 Signature Black S/H	6000	1999			
ECS Preamplifier S/H	5000	3999			
Electrocompaniet EC 4R Preamplifier S/H	1799	599			
Krell Showcase Processor X-demo	4495	3370			
Krell KRC3 Series II Remote Controlled Preamplifier S/H	2998	1695			
Music First Silver Passive x-demo	2750	2099			
Musical Fidelity X P100 Preamplifier	899	499			
Nagra PLP Battery Phono Stage x-demo	7250	4999			
Prima Luna Prologue 3 Preamplifier x-demo	1099	899			
Roksan L1 5 Preamp (requires PSU) S/H	2299	995			
Roksan L1 5 Preamplifier (requires PSU) S/H	2699	1299			
Spectral DMC 30s Reference Preamplifier x-demo					
Amplifiers					
Audio Research VM220 Valve mono Amplifiers x-demo	9000	7499			
Audio Research VS55 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	2499	1699			
Audio Research VT60 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	1995	795			
Conrad Johnson MV60 SE Valve Amplifier x-demo	2500	1895			
Krell KAV400xi Black x-demo	2498	2199			
Krell Showcase 5 multichannel Power x-demo	4999	3750			
Leben CS-300 Valve Integrated x-demo	1700	1275			
Leben CS-200 Power Amplifier x-demo	1800	1350			
McCormack DNA125 Power Amplifiers BNIB	2195	1499			
Nagra MPA RCMI x-demo	10450	7999			
Pathos Model 1 MKII x-demo	1295	975			
Prima Luna Prologue 1 x-demo	899	699			
Prima Luna Prologue 2 x-demo	1198	950			
Prima Luna Prologue 4 x-demo	799	625			
Prima Luna Prologue 5 x-demo	1099	899			
Primare A31 x-demo	1500	1125			
Rega Brio x-demo	328	249			
Veritas P400 Digital Amplifier S/H	N/A	1199			

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ARCAM FMJ SYSTEM, CD, amp, poweramp, Castle Inversion 100 large floorstanders. High quality cables, accessories, rack. True high end sound, excellent condition, £2,595. Tel 01923 662295 (West Herts)

ATACAMA EQUINOX HI-FI four-shelf rack in silver. Five star award winner. Excellent sound, £200. Also legendary Marantz CD-63 KI Signature in black, £250. NAD 422 FM only tuner. Great sound, £100. 020 8684 1274 (Surrey)

ATC SCM 19 speakers, £1,050 (£1,499.) Jas Audio super tweeters £350 (£650). Both only three months old (mint and boxed). 01225 429170 (Bath)

AUDIO NOTE ZERO valve pre/power and CD system. Fabulous sound, huge soundstage, rarely available, one year use, recent service, mint condition, boxed (£3,000) £1,600. 01992 300713 (Herts).

AVI pre/power amplifier 215 watts S21MA V2.0. Brand new line from AVI, almost new, perfect, original boxes, guarantee, only £2,000, Contact fedepenzo@hotmail.com +0039 02 2150930 (Italy).

B&W AV 7.1 speaker package (no sub). 703 main speakers, HTM 7 centre speaker in cherry finish. DS 7 dipole rear speakers in white finish (two pairs). Main speakers used once, others unused. All boxed etc; cost today £4300, sell for £2,000 no offers. 07859 388167

B&W CM4 Maple, excellent condition, owned from new, original boxes £400. Matching CMC Maple, second owner, no box, also great condition, £150. 07803 034 578 or email

richard@worklogic.co.uk (Bedford)

COPLAND CDA266 CD player. Lovingly looked after. (£1,200), sell £550 ono. Contact 01225 481055 after 6:30pm or 07962 172782 anytime (Bath).

CYRUS 8VS amplifier plus PSX-R power supply, both black, in excellent condition, £650. 01394 274350 (Suffolk)

DELTEC DPA 50S power amplifier plus special cables, £350 ono. Creek 4040 amp, £50. Pioneer PL12D record deck, £40, Technics SUV-900 amplifier, £130. 01708 457691 (Essex).

DENON DRM-710 cassette deck, three head system, Dolby B/C/HX-Pro, many features, can demo, super recording performance, in black, mint condition, £200. 07703 537210 (E. Sussex).

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 42 wall speakers in white finish, as new condition, Cost £455, accept £195. 07729 600847 (W Sussex).

FANFARE FT1 Legendary Reference Quality FM tuner with balanced and unbalanced outputs. Complete with remote control and manual, £350. needsp@bbsrc.ac.uk. Tel 01603 440405 after 7pm (Norfolk).

FOCAL JM-LAB MICRO Utopia Be. Mint, manual, inc stands, £1,750 07968 189647 (London)

JEFF ROWLAND COHERENCE One preamp with two Model 3 Mono power amps. 100W into 8 ohms, with manuals. £3,250 way split. 01255 421589 (Essex)

KALIN KN-7 preamp (valve), Rotel RB-03 power amp. Both items mint, less than one year old,

£495 pair. 01252 659058 (Surrey).

KEF IQ5 floorstanders, maple, mint and boxed, £200. 01473 410025 (Suffolk)

KLIPSCH RF-82 floorstanding speakers, cherry, mint condition. One yr old w/manual, rare find in Britain. Clean and powerful sound. (£920) £600ono. 07806 434683 (Glasgow).

KRELL DVD STANDARD/HTS Processor/Theatre Amplifier Standard. All silver, immaculate, boxed, papers etc. UK supplied (Pinewood). (£27,000) £12,000. Won't split. Call Roger 07801 287409 (London)

KRELL FPB300CX in mint condition (unused) out of the box for taking photo. £5,950 +shipping O.B.O for more details and offers email to erezvi@barak.net.il (Israel).

MERIDIAN 200 TRANSPORT with Trichord clock upgrade. Excellent condition. Manual and remote. Collectable. £150ono. 01494 727504 (South Bucks)

MICHELL ISO/Hera phono stage (separate power supply) for MC cartridges. Pristine condition. Cost £895 in 1998, not used since 2000. £100ono. Call 01359 259152 (Suffolk) ▶

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ALL QUALITY separates and especially complete systems Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, B&W etc. Fast, friendly response, willing to travel and cash paid. Please call John on: 07815 892458

CELESTION SL6, 600 or 100 loudspeakers, working, good condition, unmarked preferred, good price paid, private buyer, will collect. 01946 862815 (Cumbria).

COPLAND CSA 28 integrated amplifier. 01260 295804 (Cheshire).

DECCA LONDON international tone arm, metal headshell version with side entry cable connection. Tel 01749 676174 or e-mail: roy.cole@connectfree.co.uk (Wells).

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21 a. Onyx AO21, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer. Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

SD ACOUSTICS SD2 speakers (must be SD2) any condition considered. Contact marc 01642 864314 or email telliott30@ntlworld.com

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

FOR SALE

MISSION 780 mint, £60+pp. Tannoy 605II mint, £60+pp. Atacama 50cm stands, £40+pp excellent. QED XT-350 off reel, £8 metre. 07747 664742 or email scotchb@fsmail.net (Scotland).
MODIFIED THORENS TD150 turntable, Linn armobard, P+C Rega RB300 arm, Denon 110 high output MC cartridge, £250. Various amp, tuners and speaker cables 07956 438044 (Kent)
MUSICAL FIDELITY CDPRE24 CD player/preamp/multi-input DAC, (£2,000) £800. JVC HM-HDS4EK, 80Gb HDD/S-VHS video recorder, new and unused, (£700) £150. Panasonic NV-SV121 S-VHS VCR, new and unused, (£180) £100. 01424 442802 (Sussex)
PIONEER PD 8700 CD player, the classic upside down platter model, low use, mint and boxed, £95. 01278 782622 (Somerset)

NAIM TO IPOD/MP3 Interconnect. Neutrik five-pin 180 degree DIN to 3.5mm Minijack. OFC Copper with 100% foil screen. £9.99+postage. email johndavidwards@hotmail.com or ring 07733 441087 (Manchester).
PLINIUS SA250 MKIV and M8 pre/power, £3,500. Von Schweikert VR4JR speaker, £1,500. All very good condition with crates. Phone Lim on 07884 187203 or email limkc28@hotmail.com (London).
PMC GB1 floorstanding loudspeakers, maple finish, excellent condition, boxed. Sale due to upgrade, £650. Contact 01792 321809 (evening) or 07843 288719 (daytime) (Swansea)
PROJECT RM4 turntable with Ortofon 510mkII cartridge, as new, hardly used, Hi-Fi News Best

Buy, £150. 01268 415017 (Essex).
QUAD ESL988 electrostatics, black finish, three years old, superb sound even in small rooms, major improvement over ESL63's, manual + spikes provided, (£4,000) £1,700. For demo ring 01453 544354 (Gloucs)
REGA P2 turntable with Bias 2 cartridge, six months old, excellent, £200. 07780 853839 (London)
REGA PLANAR 3 with RB300 tone arm, vgc with original box, £140. Tannoy Mercury F4 floorstanders (applewood finish), mint and boxed, £120. Tel 01473 410025 (Suffolk)
ROGERS LS3/ 5a loudspeakers, 11 ohm (domestic) version, walnut finish, good condition, no boxes on manuals, £350ono. 01323 723292 (E. Sussex)
ROTEL RB-1090 power amp, 2x380 Watts @ 8 Ohms, Rotels flagship and best power amp ever that competes with the high end marques. Mint, boxed, one owner from new, £825. 07979 903989 (Bristol)
ROTEL RCD-951 CD player, excellent condition, boxed, £85. Denon PMA350 amplifier, excellent condition, boxed, £65. 020 7859 6652 (London).
RUARK SABRE III speakers, rich walnut finish, boxed, as new. HFC and WHF Best Buy. Lively and detailed, can demonstrate, £600. 01970 615386 (Wales).
SHANLING CDT-300 3Dsonics, £2,350. Transparent Music Link Super 1.5m RCA interconnects, £345. Vertex Kinabula, £190.

Excellent condition. All 'ono' 07810 434589 (Glasgow).
SONY DAT recorder, DTC-60ES, ES Range, £200. Ace video enhancer unit, semi-professional, world TV standards conversion, full colour & timebase correction and much more, as new, (£300) £100. 01424 442802 (Sussex)
SOUNDSTYLE speaker stands 60cm. Glossy black filled with proprietary damping compound, very heavy. Pristine condition, £39. Contact Peter 01443 813109 (Mid Glams)
STD 305M turntable, Mission 774 arm, Lentek Entre 1 MC cartridge. Meridian 101MC pre, 103D power. KEF 105 Ref speakers. Denon DRM-600 cassette. Sony DVP_N5330 DVD/CD player. All good condition. Offers. Phone Bill 02088 660 9694 (Sth Croydon).
SUGDEN BIJOU CDMASTER CD player, Headmaster preamp, Musicmaster Class A power amp, careful use and excellent condition, half cost price at £1,600 for the complete system. Stunning sound and looks. 09794 099635
TRICHORD DINO Dino+ power chord, £495. Three Leak TL12+, £275 each. Quad IIs and pre, £600. Mitsubishi LT 5V parallel tracking upright turntable, £250. 01597 825018 (Powys).
TRICHORD NC PSU and high performance interconnect. Designed for Diabolo but suits Dino as well. Superb sound. C/w Russ Andrews mains lead, (£680) £300 01384 394441 (W.Mids)
TRIO 3X SYSTEM (turntable, tuner, graphic equaliser, amp and double cassette) with Jamo 52 speaker system and Philips CD160 CD player, £125. Geoff 01252 621308 (Hants).
WILSON BENECH ARC speakers; four years old, gloss burr walnut cheeks, one owner, excellent condition and all original packaging. Will happily demo. £1,600. 07908 205519 (north London).
YAMAHA DSP-A590 Digital Sound Processing Cinema 5.1 surround sound amplifier. Annoy the neighbours for £80 (cost £350 new). Remote control included. 01993 843055 (Oxon)



Above: Ruark Sabre III loudspeaker

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How it Works

The IsoTek Mira is simple to use – first, plug the power cable from your TV or projector into the appropriate socket on the Mira, instead of into the wall socket. Next, if you have a DVD player or set-top box, plug that into MIRA's second socket. If you're using a roof aerial or satellite dish, plug that in too. Finally, plug the Mira into a wall socket using a suitable mains cable... and you're ready to roll!

Key features:

- Improves picture quality and extends the life of all televisions (LCD, plasma or CRT) and projectors.
- 22,500A of instantaneous current absorption; essential for removing high-voltage spikes.
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More about IsoTek

IsoTek is a UK-based company that specialises in power management systems for hi-fi and home cinema applications. Formed in 2001, the company has rapidly become a world leader in mains conditioning and filtration, developing a wide range of innovative, award-winning products that form complete solutions to suit every pocket. Thanks to IsoTek's painstaking attention to detail, its products significantly improve sound and picture quality, while offering protection from spikes and surges.

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